

An abstract painting with a dark, swirling central mass in shades of black and dark blue, surrounded by lighter, textured areas of grey and white. The brushstrokes are visible and expressive, creating a sense of movement and depth.

DISSIPATIO H.G.
THE VANISHING
GUIDO MORSELLI

TRANSLATED BY
FREDERIKA RANDALL

GUIDO MORSELLI (1912–1973) spent his youth in Milan, where his father was an executive with a pharmaceutical company. When he was twelve his mother died from the Spanish flu, an event that devastated the reserved child. After attending a Jesuit-run primary school and a classical secondary school, Morselli graduated from the Università degli Studi di Milano with a law degree in 1935. Instead of practicing law, however, he embarked on a long trip around the Continent. Though he wrote consistently from the remote town in the lake region of Lombardy where he lived alone, Morselli succeeded in publishing only two books over the course of his life: the essays *Proust o del sentimento* (Proust, or On Sentiment, 1943) and *Realismo e fantasia* (Realism and Invention, 1947). His many works of fiction, journalism, and philosophy were repeatedly rejected by publishers, and, frustrated by his perceived failures, he committed suicide in 1973. Hanging in his library was the motto *Etiam si omnes, ego non* (Though all do it, I do not). In fact, Morselli's nine posthumously published novels, among them *Roma senza papa* (Rome Without the Pope, 1974), *Divertimento 1889* (1975), and *Dissipatio H.G.* (1977), enjoyed considerable critical success. Morselli left his farm and lands to the town of Gavirate in his will, and today Parco Morselli looks south onto Lago di Varese and north toward the Alpine foothills.

FREDERIKA RANDALL (1948–2020) was a writer, reporter, and translator. Among her translations are Ippolito Nievo's *Confessions of an Italian*, and for NYRB, Guido Morselli's *The Communist*. She received the National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship for Translation and the PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant, and with Sergio Luzzatto, the Cundill Prize. She finished her translation of *Dissipatio H.G.* shortly before her death in Rome in 2020.

DISSIPATIO H.G.

The Vanishing

GUIDO MORSELLI

Translated from the Italian and with an introduction by

FREDERIKA RANDALL

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Translator’s Notes

INTRODUCTION

THE PLANET is tentatively coming back to life, now that mankind has suddenly vanished. Mountain goats romp on abandoned railroad tracks; birds don't just sing, they're making an unholy racket. Two owls hoot out a tender duet all night long. "Their instincts tell them something they certainly never expected: the great enemy has withdrawn." And the whole of nature has come out to celebrate the end of the world. "The end of the world?" says the last man on earth, who has been hooting along with the owls. "One of the pranks played by anthropocentrism is to suggest that the end of our species will bring about the death of animal and vegetable nature, the end of the earth itself. The fall of the heavens. . . . *Ainsi fera la morte de toutes choses notre morte*," as Old Montaigne said, "Our death will bring about the death of all things." "Come on," snaps the narrator, "The world has never been so alive as it is since a certain breed of bipeds disappeared. It's never been so clean, so sparkling, so good-humored."

The last man on earth in Guido Morselli's brilliant, disturbing novel *Dissipatio H.G.* lives near a mountain village in an unnamed country not far from Chrysopolis, a fictional city reminiscent of Zürich. It's sometime around 1973, when the novel was written, and the man is well ahead of his time in perceiving how deeply Western thought is tied up with the Anthropocene. The knowledge that Man the Measure of all Things is bound to exploit and despoil nature had not yet penetrated an Italy drunk with acquiring new cars, refrigerators, and TVs. *Dissipatio H.G.* was born premature in other ways too; the very shape of the story was peculiar. The post-apocalyptic novel, scarcely news today, was pretty much unknown in Italian literature at the time. But Morselli, like the last man on earth, was always profoundly out of synch with his times. He, too, lived in near-isolation close to a small town (Gavirate, not far from the Italian border with Switzerland); he, too, despised the materialism and the cult of money he believed had overwhelmed Italy during its postwar "economic miracle," represented in the novel by Chrysopolis, the Golden City of fifty-six banks and almost as many churches.

Morselli sent off his manuscript to Mondadori in the spring of 1973, and it came back some weeks later with a rejection letter. He had taken a brief holiday and returned to find it in the mail. In a lifetime of furious writing, it was the seventh novel by this literary outsider that publishers had declined, and this time it felt like a fatal defeat. That night Guido Morselli loaded his Browning 7.65 and shot himself, putting an end to one of postwar Italy's most original literary careers.

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Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that the novel itself begins with a suicide, a suicide deeply desired but finally thwarted. Just before the great disappearance happens, the protagonist has decided to end it all. Not wanting his body to be found, he has devised a plan to climb to a cave he's heard opens into an underground lake, where he will drown himself. But when the time comes, sitting on a ledge above the lake he begins to think about the Spanish brandy he has brought along to give him courage. It's really very good. Of course, he thinks; brandy that's made in Europe's south, where the sun brings out the sugar in the grape, will always be better than what the French can achieve with their cloudy skies—which is why they make such a fetish of those oak barrels they age it in. The superiority of French cognac is a great scam, he thinks. His train of thought begins to fizzle out, as does his will to die, and he gets up and leaves the cave, only to find that while he was away, all of humanity has disappeared.

Dissipatio H.G.: the title might seem to suggest a leisurely dissipation, but in fact the disappearance of the *humani generis*, the human race, is abrupt. The Latin words, according to Morselli, are those of a fourth-century pagan Neoplatonist, prophesying the demise of the species. "[I]n the Latin of late empire, *dissipatio* meant evaporation, or nebulization,* or some physical process like that." As the last man tells it, human beings simply vanish from the earth leaving all their detritus behind them—without so much as moving their chairs back from their desks or even minimally disturbing the bedcovers.

Unconvinced at first that he is the only survivor of the species, the last man visits the grand hotels of his mountains where he "shops" for provisions in pantries and freezers. He goes to the airport and spends the night on a chair, waiting in vain for the arriving flights from Caracas, Tehran, and Montreal. He breaks into his old girlfriend Tuti's house, eats from her refrigerator, sleeps in her bed, feels mildly guilty about the fact he didn't love her. From the town department store he takes TV sets, film cameras, bottles of Coke, and tourist posters, and piles them up in the square in a monumental "cenotaph" to honor the missing. He visits the newspaper where he used to work:

[T]he linotype machines were still going through their crazy motions, the skeletal arms somehow

continuing to rise and fall. When *they* disappeared (at two in the morning) this was where production stood: linotypists composing in the print room, editors finishing off the last stories upstairs, press not yet rolling. The wire service flashes, frozen on the teletype machines. I didn't bother to read them but I could see they were interrupted. Transmission had broken off at the other end, while here everything was normal. In its special stall, the IBM with its red lights lit. In fact, all the lights are still burning in the office, and in the secretary's room—that would be Miss Manàas as always—a little fan continues to hum on her desk. She'd been writing and the pen lies across the page, as if fallen from her hand.

The clever, manic, sometimes annoyingly over-cultivated mind* of the novel's memorable protagonist, too, has something in common with the author himself. The unnamed narrator is a writer, a journalist, who has left his job in Chrysopolis and moved to a solitary outpost in the mountains to escape human society and the ambition, greed, and noise it produces:

Switchback by switchback I ascend to the kingdom of the oaks and the beech, past the chestnuts with their huge domes, until I meet the tall, slim species, treetops lost in the fog. My real family—and my only one. I've rejoiced in them before. For a moment I'm invaded with the usual pleasure, a physical sensation, felt in the breath and the blood. This is my country: houses of dark wood, red shutters framed in white, the sweet-smelling, reviving evening air.

In his peaceful paradise, the last man is always feverishly pondering some philosophical problem, as if his mind must constantly race in order to keep himself alive. To translate the novel is to wrestle with a solipsist. The prose is clipped, abbreviated, as if intended only for him. He's hard to follow, self-absorbed. In fact, the last man often doesn't seem to care whether you can follow him. But his emotions, though tamped down, are lush, extravagant. And he's witty, ironic. Of course he's a solipsist, he says; in philosophical jargon solipsism just means a perspective confined entirely to the self—and who else is there now but him?

Morselli himself, in his relative isolation in rural Lombardy, did not want to be a solipsist. Born into bourgeois comfort, Guido, as an adult, lived out a frugal existence in the country, reading and writing, riding his horse Zeffirino in the hills. On his identity papers he gave his occupation as farmer. He grew grapes and made wine, a red called Sasso di Gaviate, which was said to be prized by high prelates* of the Church in Rome. A few bottles recently surfaced, now fifty years old. He was "difficult, extravagant, unstable," with "moments of festive joy and others of gloomy depression," wrote his friend Maria Bruna Bassi, the person who most supported him through years of discouragement. Valentina Fortichiari, the excellent editor of the modern Adelphi editions, tells us that although he had no home in any political party, he was always alert to human injustice, and while he had no love for organized religion, he was a convinced believer.* His religious faith served to investigate the problem of evil, he said. With publishers he could be arrogant, defensive, proud in a self-destructive way. Once, at the offices of Mondadori, he suddenly ducked behind a column. He had spotted Giorgio Mondadori, the publisher and a friend from school days, and felt he would die of shame if the man thought he'd come to ask a favor.

The few photographs of Morselli in the public domain—lean and shy, standing by his car on a muddy country track; dashing in sailing whites, beside a boat—kept me company while I translated the text. It is tempting to read *Dissipatio* as autobiography, and certainly it presents parallels with Morselli's existence. But we'd be wise to remember the heroic gesture of empathy the novelist made when he created the figure of Walter Ferranini in *The Communist*, a true believer who couldn't have been more different from Morselli himself. Steeped in the sense of failure and melancholy of his last years, informed by the books he read and the events he witnessed, *Dissipatio* provides a partial portrait—many-faceted and abstract—of its author, but it is also a novel of invention.

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In Italian *tardo impero*, late empire, and the more loaded synonym *basso impero*, with its implications of decadence and End Times, refer to the period that begins with the Roman emperor Constantine and his conversion to Christianity in AD 312. At the Greek colony of Chrysopolis (Golden City) across the Bosphorus from Byzantium, Constantine would fight a battle in 324 to establish his new capital, Constantinople, and take control of the Eastern Empire, even as the West was sinking into strife, corruption, and decadence. The novel's Latin title (seemingly a reference to an ancient author but in fact most likely Morselli's invention), the litany of Latin phrases scattered through the text, and of course the name Chrysopolis itself, all contribute to the novel's "late imperial" flavor. The West, Morselli thought,

was decadent, first of all intellectually. European thought and philosophy, beginning with Hegel* and his notion of history, had become arrogantly and misguidedly anthropocentric. And culpably “geocentric”: seeing one of the first photographs from space in 1966, the Earth appearing as a tiny crescent moon, “the first time we’ve seen our human condition *from outside ourselves*,” Morselli lamented man’s “retrograde geocentrism, hundreds of years behind the science,” and how loath we are to see our correct place in the cosmos. And we’ve also lost “the reverential fear that vast, uncontaminated nature once inspired,” he writes: the *metus silvanus* (dread of the forest) and the ancient *pavor montium* (fear of the mountains) our ancestors told of in fables.

Dissipatio hints, too, at the irrelevance of the material powers that be in the last man’s Alpine province, the international banks, and US military. At one point he drives to the Eleventh Army base to make certain that the empire has not collapsed:

America go home: the usual graffiti accompanies me. Thanks to a *No Entry* sign I recognize the road that leads to the base, which as it winds down becomes a Sunset Boulevard, with mini-skyscrapers, villas and semi-detached dwellings, playgrounds and parks, swimming pools and a bowling alley. Even a few out-of-place palm tufts. The sentry boxes in front of the immense gate contain no sentries (their weapons, yes), probably because of the hour. It’s midday. I walk around the fence, which extends for many kilometers, and find an opening, as expected. Every encampment of every army in the world has its clandestine entry points and the Eleventh’s base has quite a few, including one big enough to admit an automobile. I drive through and explore the village street by street, sundering the deep silence, passing rows of enormous bourgeois Chevrolets neatly lined up by the sidewalks. I coast by office buildings, warehouses, workshops, make a turn—and find other office buildings, other flowerbeds, other warehouses, other Chevrolets, a mirror image that fades into the mist.

But there are no people, no soldiers, no local employees: the base has been abandoned; its elaborate ruins perfectly preserved. He is quite alone.

As his solitude turns bleaker and icier, the last man summons up nostalgic memories of the only friend he thinks he has ever had. Karpinsky was a psychiatrist who treated him years ago, a man for whom he feels something that can only be described as love. The doctor is a figure who turns up in several other Morselli novels: as Dr. Abraham in *Past Conditional* and Dr. Newcomer in *The Communist*. They are wise, generous, and emotionally balanced medical men, but also more: faintly branded as saviors, even Christ figures. Karpinsky, whom the last man is “waiting for,” as Beckett would have it, when *Dissipatio* comes to a close, was murdered, still very young, in a knife fight between two nurses in the violent mental asylum* where he had volunteered. The love the last man feels for him is not sexual, but his unconscious seems to confess to, if not homoerotic feelings, at least a distinct desire for androgyny.* In a clearing on the mountain he imagines the trees he loves “penetrating” him to lend him their life force. He begins to wear women’s clothes: a garter belt with pale blue rosettes, lace underpants, stockings. The last man on earth is bored with masculine pretenses and male attire. In the 1960s and early ’70s Morselli turned out volume after volume of his sui generis speculative fiction, novels like *Roma senza Papa*, *Divertimento 1889*, *The Communist*, and *Past Conditional*. He was inventing the form, or if you will, the genre: a mixture of essay and historical invention with the psychological texture of fictional realism. In *Dissipatio*, the social criticism we’d expect in a post-apocalyptic novel takes second place to a frank account of the last man’s abject loneliness. In Anglophone speculative/science fiction (John Wyndham’s *Day of the Triffids*, J. G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World*, Ursula Le Guin’s *The Lathe of Heaven*, William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, to name only a few) social diagnosis is usually the purpose of the exercise. But Morselli disliked sociology; he called it *sociologismo*, as if it were an ideology. He didn’t read contemporary science fiction, but Jules Verne was a favorite, and he may have read M. P. Shiel’s 1901 novel *The Purple Cloud*, which is more like his own novel than later examples of the genre. The only literary clue relevant to apocalypses in *Dissipatio* is a fleeting reference to Robinson Crusoe. Among his contemporaries he felt closest to Italo Calvino and craved his approval.

Ironic, contemplative, psychologically astute, *Dissipatio* is sometimes wry and even funny, but also quite a tragic portrait of a man so solitary that even when the others were alive he behaved like the last man on earth. At the end of the book he’s no longer living in time (history), but Nature is, which consoles him:

So here I sit here on a bench on the boulevard, looking at the life that’s unfolding before my eyes in this strange eternity. The air shines with a dense humidity. Rainwater runs off in rivulets (the sewers in the old city must be blocked) that flow together onto the street and deposit, day by day, a thin

layer of soil on the asphalt. It's not much more than a veil of earth, and yet something green is growing on it, not the usual city grass, but wild plants. The market of markets will one day be countryside. With buttercups and chicory in flower.

The stony palaces and dry asphalt of Chrysopolis will disappear as plants and trees grow. In this strange eternity, life is abundant.

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In 1974, just a year after Morselli died, the Milanese publishing house Adelphi began to issue his novels, one by one, to considerable acclaim. His friend Maria Bruna Bassi was instrumental in getting them considered, and Giuseppe Pontiggia, the reader for Adelphi, recommended they be published. What could have changed, that novels of no interest in 1973 were suddenly hailed by critics as fresh and exciting in 1974?

Perhaps it's worth considering that, with hindsight, 1973 is often seen as the end of an era: the end of the broad prosperity and expansion across the West that followed World War II. It was the year OPEC oil prices skyrocketed. The gold / dollar standard had recently come to an end. The American war in Vietnam ceased with the Paris Peace Accords but the accumulated costs, moral and monetary, were just beginning to be felt. The US intervention had sowed anger, discredit, and disillusion, and not just at home, but around the world.

Morselli, who followed current affairs and “futurist” thinkers among many other things, and who belonged to the environmental and cultural heritage association Italia Nostra, had been brooding about the damage done to the human soul and the natural environment by runaway economic growth and lack of care for the planet. He also seemed to perceive that history was moving on, and may have sensed that the expansive, hopeful mood that had followed the war in Europe and across the Atlantic had run its course.

A new era was beginning, as yet only dimly perceived. It was one of those times when new voices can be heard, and Morselli's magnificent speculative histories at last found their moment to emerge. The years have if anything rendered *Dissipatio H.G.*'s melancholy assessment of human achievement on this earth more haunting.

—FREDERIKA RANDALL

DISSIPATIO H.G.

THE AUDIO-visual debris keeps me company. It's the most immediate remains of what has been left to me of *them*. Two dispatches are purely verbal, from radio broadcasts I suppose. One reports the failed hijacking and consummated rape of a girl on an Olympic Airways flight, and the other, in English, might be from the not very trustworthy Voice of Europe: "Here's a favorite Polish joke: 'The state pretends to pay us, we pretend to work.'" And two images: a bottle with a crown and red letters in the foreground spelling out Seagram's Canadian Whisky, and through the lens of my binoculars, the white-lined quadrant of the tennis court behind the Hôtel Belvedere. My automatic memory contains no more. These recollections float by, nebulous, insistent.

It's debris that amounts to little. Relics, by now. Half a month has passed since that night; half a century, I could equally say. First reaction, an extended panic. And then, but quickly brushed away, incredulity, and then fear again. Now, habituation. Resignation? I'd say acquiescence, actually. With intervals of lofty hilarity and fierce solace.

I'm leaving the offices of the newspaper. I worked there when I was younger, and today I returned and walked all around, to check on something. And I was right; the linotype machines were still going through their crazy motions, the skeletal arms somehow continuing to rise and fall. When *they* disappeared (at two in the morning) this was where production stood: linotypists composing in the print room, editors finishing off the last stories upstairs, press not yet rolling. The wire service flashes, frozen on the teletype machines. I didn't bother to read them but I could see they were interrupted. Transmission had broken off at the other end, while here everything was normal. In its special stall, the IBM with its red lights lit. In fact, all the lights are still burning in the office, and in the secretary's room—that would be Miss Manàas as always—a little fan continues to hum on her desk. She'd been writing and the pen lies across the page, as if fallen from her hand. But the chair remains upright. It hasn't even been pushed back from the desk. As if she had vaporized; how did she manage that?

My properly secular newspaper has its offices (had) across from the Lutheran bishop's seat. In my day the bishop was Burg, a little fellow I knew only by sight but who, whenever we crossed paths, always took the trouble to say hello first. The episcopal seat, in an Austrian rococo palace, is empty today. In a small niche on the corner of the building, I see a knob with a polite message in Gothic script: "In an emergency, ring at any hour." When I press the knob, Sunday chimes, invisible, slice through the muggy air. I ring again. The bishop must be making a pastoral visit, or he's gone on vacation; or he, too, has decamped with all his acolytes and the faithful, like the others, like everyone. Like the custodians of the law. Up ahead on theater row I see the police station. I enter, walk through every room on two floors, from the guard post to the phone bank. Not a soul. On the corner near the customs house there's a woman's umbrella, upside down and open on the pavement, and a purse. A taxi stands by the sidewalk in front of a smallish house. I pick up the purse, and there's a checkbook in it, and a genuine pocket watch, an old one, the hands stopped at 2, inscribed with the words "To Meggy Weiss Lo Surdo, happy hours": Lovely Meggy, returning late from an evening with friends (or friend, male); she's about to swing through the gate when something suddenly obliges her to dash off, leaving all the worldly goods she has on her person in that handbag.

The humble taxi driver also heard that urgent, compelling, quite impartial call. And he, too, has obeyed, leaving behind his most precious possession, his automobile.

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I don't like Chrysopolis* much, in fact I can't stand it. For me it is the Biblical antitype*, the triumphant consummation of everything I scorn, the epitome of all I detest in this world, my negative *caput mundi*.* My *fuga saeculi*, my flight from this world, was even then an escape from this place, the precise material expression of our century. Even the fact I'm looking at it now feels implausible, dispiriting.

Chrysopolis is empty. On the streets, in the squares, on the quays, and in the center, it is as calm and orderly as it must have been that night at two AM, but empty. How many were there? Four hundred thousand, four hundred twenty thousand. In any event, they *were*.

I've come in search of just a few thousand of the departed. Those who live in my valley. But here I find a mega-exodus, a desertion *en masse*. This thing (unthinkable) surprised people in their sleep here too. Night's suspension of collective life has simply been prolonged—indefinitely. Although I continue to imagine they have fled, in truth they haven't fled anywhere, just as they didn't at Pompeii. Nor have they

been reduced to ashes, as they were at Hiroshima. They've gone in some other fashion. Been abducted. Snatched, seized, dragged out of their houses and other places. Out of their bodies, even.

No, not out of their bodies, apparently. The June showers are coming down, but Chrysopolis reveals no trace of bodies. What's left is, yes, bodily, but not organic. Scraps of litter on the streets, stubs of movie tickets, empty cigarette packets; neon signs, still lit, jets of water rising from fountains, cars, rows of them below the apartment buildings and along the avenues in the park. The Golden City is intact. The escapees (or whatever forces made them leave) took nothing with them. The tables outside Café Odeon met with no violence, and neither did the Jugendstil façade. The gleaming windows, behind which, a thousand years ago, Trotsky sat with his wife, and Lenin, are also intact.

There are other remains, too, organic and alive but not human. The geometry of tulips in front of the Hôtel Esplanade, acacia trees bending under the weight of their blossoms. The celebrated jasmine, or gymnosperm, that surges out of Baron Aaron's villa right in the center. Crows on the façade of the National Theater; cats, hordes of them, on the steps of the Crédit Financier or the Diskonto.

Beneath those monuments to Mitteleuropean finance—no, to Continental finance—the cats pursue one another. They mate, howling perversely. And not just cats. In front of the gates of the powerful Bankers' Association (in my day they used to say they were solid gold, those gates) I saw guano stains, and thought they were due to pigeons. It was a hen. Pecking at a heap of sodden leaves, and I have to admit the sight of it was traumatizing. A hen. The four horses of the Apocalypse staggering over that patch of asphalt wouldn't have startled me more.

And now, the return trip. No expert driver, I'm bearing down on the accelerator in fear and fury. Forty kilometers across the plain, I've counted a dozen cars that have run off the road. I stop at the point where, on the way here, I saw a bus wrecked against a concrete retaining wall. The bus is twisted, seats and windows smashed to pieces, but there are no traces of damage to the occupants. A crazy thought comes to me: when the vehicle crashed, there weren't any passengers in it, not one, not even the driver. *Back then*, car accidents took lives; here, it's the taking of the life (the subtraction, the elimination) that causes the accident. The sole victim is the automobile. Further on, a mail truck lies in a field, wheels in the air, mail sacks marked "Valuables, Registered" spilling from the doors. Beside the driver's seat, a gun; a gendarme was escorting the delivery. He's gone too, but the valuables, registered, that are now spread out over the grass are in no danger. On that same field, upright and motionless, is an electric locomotive, derailed from the tracks that run parallel to the road. The rest of the train is still in place on the tracks. I remember when I was a kid the farmers around here used to call railroad cars "gray cows." The gray cows now graze peacefully; the kilowatts, like the horsepower, have returned to nature. Untamed.

Now the plain comes to an end, and the mountains begin to close in around me. Switchback by switchback I ascend to the kingdom of the oaks and the beech, past the chestnuts with their huge domes, until I meet the tall, slim species, treetops lost in the fog. My real family—and my only one. I've rejoiced in them before. For a moment I'm invaded with the usual pleasure, a physical sensation, felt in the breath and the blood. This is my country: houses of dark wood, red shutters framed in white, the sweet-smelling, reviving evening air. But my valley—I'm on my way up it now—is deserted, the houses are dark. I can switch off the headlights, I won't meet anyone on the road, and no one will have to pull over to let me pass. I won't meet a face, won't hear a voice.

And that seems unfair, cruel, to me. In the city I was just a spectator. Here I must live.

Where have they gone. Why have they gone.

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I've sung the praises of these mountain people before, people who didn't consider emigrating (unlike those in other, nearby valleys), who were stubbornly loyal to their villages, almost biologically attached, back when the mountain was no industrial plant, and snow no precious raw material. When the tourist gold mine opened, it wasn't these people who prospected, but the residents of the plain who came up here to build hotels and houses and rail lines, and then cable cars and ski lifts. The natives cling to the margins; toward these new guests they display an ironic pity that stiffens in winter when the slalom worshipers arrive. One time I wrote: They come struggling by with their animals and their pack baskets under the bright lights of the Victoria and the Bellevue, past the swimming pools and the mini-golf course, and in their eyes is the same tedium, the same resignation that the people of the *pagus* in Constantine's day showed before the basilicas of the new Christian religion.

But my appreciation of them now seems quite undeserved. They, too, have vanished. I don't believe they were swept away by some unnatural force. Like the citizens of Chrysopolis they simply succumbed to collective madness, although they should have been immunized against it. Or they followed an order they should have disobeyed. They were complicit, because there is no force, no authority, that could

have obliged them.

Permit me a slim hope, something held out by my “shepherds,” at least them. Frederica and Giovanni. They’ve always offered their attentive, brusque, but maybe nonetheless affectionate concern not only to their cows and goats, but to me. Will I find them up there scowling at the door, waiting? I haven’t seen them for days. Yesterday I had to open the barn and let the starving animals go free.

Widmad is lifeless. The flags lined up on the terrace at the Kursaal stupidly salute only me. So too the geraniums spilling out of the boxes at City Hall and the streetlight winking at the corner of the market square. The lights and the chalky facades of the great hotels reflected on the wet asphalt shine for me alone.

I leave the car in the middle of the street; it won’t bother anyone. Once the engine is silenced, I am even more alone, I who detest that noise.

I begin walking home.

It’s a fifty-minute climb up a narrow path through the spruce and larches in a silence that only a few days ago thrilled me. Going forward is a struggle. I’m tired. I listen, keep an eye out. I’m afraid.

A DOG is following me, a spaniel with that mossy, musky smell that pedigreed dogs have when it rains. Trailing a leash, desperate. Famished, probably, like Frederica and Giovanni's animals. After a short while I lose sight of him. Next to the Hôtel Zemmi cable car stop, the road divides in several trails, and I read for the thousandth time the wooden signs in red, yellow, and green that indicate the different mountain routes. I take the steepest one, my trail: for four years now this has been my path to privilege, that of living above and away, living alone. But now I'm afraid.

Some days later, I am remembering that fear.

It was not, at first, a nervous collapse—anxiety, terror—so much as deep, considered horror, fed and abetted by my critical faculties, which would ordinarily fight fear. That, or my violated common sense. It was a thinking, reasoning fear, lucidly recapitulating the situation, quite capable of facing the situation. The panic came later.

I remember, and try to understand. The Inexplicable is not the unknown, not the attractive mystery (attractive because it's good enough to stay a decent distance away from us?). No, the Inexplicable is something else, something that when it is overwhelming and persistent saps a person's life energy. My response to the absurd was physical, animal, natural; unable to wish it away, I perceived it as an immediate, overwhelming act of aggression, and froze. It was an atavistic response; a helpless beast does the same thing, freezes.

That evening, that night, the next day, I was sunk in utter inertia. I felt no impulse to flee, the trauma I'd endured was expressed in paralysis. Locked in my four rooms with doors and windows barred (at one point I'd decided to barricade myself in) I waited for it to arrive and strike me. Finish me off, seeing that my turn was coming soon. I was condemned; beyond my walls, everything was submerged in a death fluid and I was immersed in it, a diving bell at the bottom of the sea. By osmosis, that fluid would creep through the walls. My anxiety was conscious and focused, not frenetic, and I was present to myself. At one point, my mind clear of hallucinations, I coolly listened for the suspect rustling of gigantic bestial creatures lurking outside the house (ancient sauropods or Cretaceous lizards). I was able to be somewhat active; the psychological collapse didn't block me completely. On the second day I sat down at the typewriter, planning to copy out notes for the revision of a book, which an editor had been waiting for since last year. (Quite grotesquely, that book would rescue me from a nightmare on the third day.) I sat before the typewriter all afternoon, never touching it. The clickety-clack of the keys would have upset me. Either that, or some superstition wouldn't allow me to break the silence. I reheated the coffee on tiptoe in the kitchen. The rain was pattering hard on the cobblestones outside, but I felt I must make no sound. Like *them*, I must be dead. My bodily functions were normal: I ate with appetite, even voraciously; the horror was ongoing, without intervals, so I shuddered as I ate, in time with my chewing. I slept, dreamlessly, strange to say. Smoked the odd pipe, drank the usual brandy. Urinated more often than usual; it's a well-known fact that fear excites the excretory system. Even when fear becomes one with the person, as was happening to me.

It went on for two days, no more, and not even full days, before the crisis resolved things. As to how it felt: it was a taste of eternity.

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And yet, the Inexplicable came about because of me. Or anyway, the events coincided, at the beginning, with a strictly private thing of mine. A conjunction, a correlation, I dare say—not mere chance.

That fanciful night between June 1 and June 2. The night when it was decided that I would commit suicide.

Why.

Because the negative outweighed the positive. On my scales. By seventy percent. Was that a banal motive? I'm not sure.

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So far as precise estimates go, I confess my psychic life is poor. Also simple, elementary. Someone's said to be "a born accountant": I must confess I don't recognize the unconscious frustrations and visceral pains, the festering evils that afflict modern man. A colleague accused me of reductive criticism. I was forever insisting (everything's already been said but nobody's listening, so it has to be constantly

restated)* that the interior monologue, typical of contemporary literature, that gives vent to unconscious sorrows and visceral suffering in capillary inspections of the self and false encounters with the other, is proof that we haven't moved beyond the psychologism of that sub-feeling and sub-thinking that was already artificial (and dull) a century ago. However, anyone looking into my case would certainly not make the mistake of psychologism. He would have to be reductive, no way around it.

I decided to kill myself in the first place because I was the victim of a kind of mafia. And there's no escaping the mafia, I knew.

It began with an illness. Bodily, not mental; real, not imaginary; somewhat chronic. One of those illnesses that allow you to go on living, and when treated with a certain amount of humanity, to be cured. And in practice, I was on my way to being cured. The doctor at Chrysopolis who was supposed to be taking care of me instead sent me to a specialist, and the specialist to a radiologist, and he ordered a second specialist, and he a second radiologist, and he prescribed some tests (only eleven, Wasserman to ESR) to be done at a clinic in Chrysopolis, after which I was advised to undergo a series of diagnostic procedures, then sent to another specialist (#3) by another radiologist (also #3). And so it went, in pairs, or rather threes, (specialist, radiologist, clinic with lab for exams, brief inpatient stay) expanding exponentially to total, a few weeks ago, twelve specialists, twelve radiologists, thirty-three sets of blood tests, and twenty-seven series of diagnostic procedures over a period of two years and eight months. An experience familiar to millions of victims like myself taken in by the "early detection" racket. A racket that's part of the System (in the Marcusian sense)* and thus is benevolently considered by the sociologists (it goes unmentioned, uncondemned) but which meets in every way the criteria of mafia extortion. The initial illness is not serious, but could become so, and therefore "we must keep an eye on it" via frequent medical interventions to ascertain "in a diagnostic setting" whether there has been possible degeneration. But, wonders the subject (passive), what's the purpose when, should "possible degeneration" manifest itself, it is incurable, and will go untreated? Every three months you force me to await the verdict: "Has it appeared, or hasn't it?" What's the purpose when, if it has "appeared," the death agony will be slow and certain, conscious, and unavoidable?

The purpose, patently, is not so much the money, counted in the hundreds of thousands, but the power. The subjugation of throngs of men and women to a class. Or a clan, or a *corporazione*. I don't wish to be dramatic, but to my mind, capitalist exploitation, boss over worker, is pretty much an amusing parlor game next to this other forced subservience. And since escape is impossible, the attendant blackmail is bound to be the most vicious and entrapping.

It's an industry built on the soundest of economic bases. It's not exposed to market downturn. Within the group, its members practice strict solidarity. It has no competition from outside. No crises for them.

For us, for me, yes: in my case the crisis was one of disgust. Disgust with myself. There were mornings when I tried not to see myself in the mirror as I stood shaving.

When a person leaps over the balcony or throws himself under a train, some driving psychic mechanism is at work, obviously, but on its own, it's not sufficient. There must be a trigger, said old Durkheim, and the fellow was not devoid of acumen.

Returning to my own case, what comes to mind is this: last autumn I found—a couple of hundred paces from my mountain retreat (1,395 meters above sea level)—some numbered stakes in the ground. They gave me a fever. Literally. A frenetic investigation, consultations with friends who knew something, friends in Chrysopolis. I call it the Golden City but it is above all the country's operative hub where decisions are made, especially opprobrious decisions. The news was deadly. A despicable "anonymous" company, Euro-Autoroute SA, according to rumor owned by two powerful local entrepreneurs, had plans to build a Le Havre–Athens continental motorway. Where this artery crossed the mountains it would "impact" Widmad Lewrosen. There would be a huge tunnel that let out in the upper valley and assorted "creative solutions" would be built, among them a "daring" viaduct in reinforced concrete over the Zemmi (*my* Zemmi), as well as a cloverleaf and entrance ramps. And a motel.

As Durkheim might say, there's your trigger. Slow-acting. The winter went by, then spring, which comes late up here and exquisitely, began to arrive. It was mournful for me, with those red and white stakes under my nose. My decision grew firm, and though I lingered over the details in a self-satisfied and somewhat comic way, I was quite calm and certain about it.

I would be gone, leaving no trace. That point seemed essential to me. People, if they did look into it, must come to the conclusion I was permanently missing. Or better, mysteriously annihilated, dissolved into nothing.

The good Giovanni, my neighbor, caretaker, shepherd, husband of my housekeeper Frederica, suggested the place without intending to. He knew about a certain cave, up on the spurs of Karessa, a cave discovered by him and explored by speleologists (specologists? I'm not altogether sure what they're

called) on further visits. As for the date that I chose, between June 1 and 2, there was a specific reason for it: I was born on June 2 at midday, and I didn't want to turn forty. A point of passage, forty, when maturity begins to decline toward old age. I wanted to be off while I was still thirty-nine, if only technically.

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At twelve thirty, having eaten nothing, I started out, creeping past the house of my shepherds on tiptoe. But Giovanni was there, in the doorway: "What are you doing up at this hour?" He'd just come from the barn. A goat had gotten untied and was bothering the other animals, they were making noise. "You must help me build a shed for the goats. Goats and cows don't get along."

I said nothing in reply, but took the path that runs beside our meadows and then heads into the shadows of the fir trees. A downward spiral (I thought to myself, walking). You've always taken downhill slopes in your life (I thought); the last one will be straight down. Your life will come to an end in a narrow rocky channel. It was more an academic consideration than a practical one, just then. But I was as light and dry as a pumice stone, and the image of a fine channel into which my existential curve would slip pleased me. I had no regrets, for everything was used up; no uncertainties, for everything was planned, and my *habitus*, my nature, as a facilitator, obviated the need for courage.

In reality I didn't have to descend at all, I had to climb. The cave opening is at 1,600 meters and the path led sharply up to it. I was winded when I got there, but otherwise fine. I recognized the opening immediately although I'd never seen it before. I lit, and then immediately extinguished my flashlight, which I didn't need (being a *nictalope*,* equipped with night vision), and walked comfortably; there were no stalactites, no bats (as I'd feared), and the ground was flat and just slightly slippery. By twelve fifty I was at the edge of the well, a large oval pit with standing water down below. Giovanni's description had been meticulous: the well was shaped somewhat like an S on its side; after a short stretch downhill, it rose for a couple of meters and then there was another bend (a natural siphon that trapped the water). From there it was a dozen meters straight down to a sealed lake, Lake of Solitude it's called, that doesn't communicate with the outside. I only had to let myself down into the well, hold my breath and swim past the siphon, then fall. Straight up or head first, my choice. Into the lake. Three or four minutes later, I'd drown.

On the edge of the well, feet dangling in the dark, I allowed myself a sip of brandy. I had brought half a bottle with me. At a quarter past midnight,* if I pushed off still seated, I'd be down there quickly, a couple of strokes to the siphon, then the final jump. But at thirty past by my watch I was still there. Contemplating. I was contemplating Spanish brandy, and the fact that my Spanish brandy was every bit as good as the French product. Why was that? Because, yes, it made sense, if you distill wines with a high sugar content (those that come from the south) the result can only be superior. Those French Premier Bois are made with varieties that ripen under a miserly sun. Any advantage lent by aging in the famous oak barrels of the Charente is neutralized by that fact. Now it was twenty to one, and I'd come to a conclusion: The glory enjoyed by French cognac was due to the collective power of suggestion, admittedly a power that's been working for centuries. Either that, or it was just one of those phony miracles effected by advertising.

No. For me, there was nothing humorous about these ruminations on distilling. (And note that no further sips from the bottle succeeded the first.)

Nor did my thoughts disguise some deep angst. Although I wasn't in a particularly introspective mood, I felt clearheaded and calm. And well, strangely, unshakably well. On that unexpected note came what followed. I didn't act, I was acted upon by organic logic, that is: some eighty-five kilograms of living substance just didn't obey. Aware, in its way, of the rule that to die is to be materially transformed, the matter simply refused to budge.

By a quarter to one I was already on my way back out of the cave. Still inside, I hit my head hard on a protruding rock. It was a powerful blow, and it stunned me, and just then a great peal of thunder shook the valley, which was as black as the cavern I was emerging from. It was the season's first thunderstorm.

Perhaps because I was still dazed after hitting my head, I took the wrong path back. After descending the mountain for an hour I found myself not at home but in front of a kiosk where in summer they sell water and drinks to hikers. It was of course closed, but there was a phone booth outside. I thought, why not use it?

I CALLED 3-3-3, A Friend in Need. Am I being ironic? Not at all. Our society's good Samaritanism, its hypocritical offers of help to the very people society tosses out, these were just the sort of homilies that under the circumstances, I could do without. Mine was merely a dull curiosity, a wish to hear a sleepy voice ("My friend, it's all right, you can tell me") and then hang up. And a wish to get out of the weather, for a gelid rain was pouring down. But 3-3-3 did not pick up. Maybe the line was down? I dialed 1-1, The Exact Time, and it cluck-clucked, "It is two o'clock and zero minutes. It is two o'clock and zero minutes. . . ."

Zero. I climbed the path toward home—that is, I pulled back from the narrow channel's grip. No recriminations, no accusations of cowardice, just annoyance on my part. Anyone who has lived through such a deferment (a sentence commuted is what I call it, after two previous experiences) will not be surprised.

On the bed, still dressed, all but frozen from my feet to my ears, I thought about the siphon and the channel, and they didn't seem to me quite as lugubrious as they actually were. Specious, vaguely theatrical, maybe. But the ultimate solution, neat and clean and simple, was right at hand. I went to get her, my black-eyed girl, and lay back on the bed with her. I pressed my mouth to hers at length.

I invited her with my finger, once. But not vigorously enough. Then a second time, my mouth still pressed to hers. But a third time, no, because suddenly the shadows enveloped me. And stillness.

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I had fallen asleep, a mortal sleep. And a noisy one—as morning came I was snoring so loudly the window panes were shaking. I ought to explain that I have a device that tape-records any sounds I emit while sleeping. And those recordings have offered me discoveries quite a bit more valuable than Freudian oneiromancy: a fine selection of moaning, laughing, exclaiming, cursing, begging, praying, all material of considerable interest.

(I must explain this, I thought. But to whom? No one, clearly. I don't subscribe to this idea that everything one expresses, no matter how private, is a form of communication. That "I must explain" presumes no one and nothing. Addressed to myself, it's a useful tautology. It keeps me company.)

By nine AM I was awake; I pushed aside the black-eyed girl, still in my bed, chilly and useless. On my pillow was a clot of dried blood. I touched my head: my hair was sticky with blood. It was the blow to my head I'd sustained while leaving the cavern. It didn't seem to be serious. I warmed some food for breakfast and ate with revenant hunger. Sitting in front of the kitchen window, I gulped down my coffee and milk, bread and butter, jam and honey, and scoured the valley with my eyes. From the telephone booth I had seen, in the distance, on the other side, two beacons lighting up the night—still, vertical, pointing toward the heavens.

My vision is perfect. It was raining hard, but from the kitchen window I could make out a dark object hidden behind the larch trees quite some way down the slope under the roadway that runs up to the Malga Ross. I could even see that it was a car, fallen, I imagined, from the narrow road above and perched vertically on its back wheels, radiator up. It's an uninhabited place, and people rarely drive along that road; there could be someone in that car, someone who'd been hurt and couldn't move. Therefore, I thought, I must go. I went out, following a trail that goes down to the creek and then comes up the other side. Carrying an umbrella and a walking stick with a metal ferrule in case I needed to break open the car windows. Venturing out was probably my reply to the hypocrites of 3-3-3. Or maybe I was planning to make a fresh start, based on generosity. (To return to the living, as it were.) Twenty minutes later I was at the creek and my good intentions had fizzled out, if indeed I'd ever had them. Our creek is one of those that swells a lot; after an hour of rain it was deep and roaring loudly, and I had to cross it. There's no bridge, I'd have to jump from rock to rock and then scramble up a steep bank. Furthermore, I was alone, and if I did find someone injured, how would I look after them? I'd have to go down to the village in search of help. Well then, I might as well go right away.

I went back to the house to change; the mud was up to my knees. I had a hot coffee, and set out again, intending to alert the gendarmes who are posted right at the edge of the village on the road from the Malga Ross. There are two and I know them: Sergeant Rabost is always friendly when we meet and tells me, "We're bachelor brothers, but you're a volunteer and we're not." By ten AM I was at their chalet. I found neither and kept going toward Widmad. I found no one. The shop windows were lit, the street lamps too (because of the fog?), but there wasn't one passerby, not one car on the move. The first aid

station was empty, so were the garages and the hotels. I thought I understood: Thanksgiving. June 2 is the national Day of Thanksgiving, a holiday devoted to fasting and prayer, when you neither buy nor sell, go neither on a hike nor to the football stadium, when the cafés and restaurants are closed, and my most pious compatriots (convinced they are the elect among us) remunerate Providence with that grace that so favors them. And they aren't meant to worry about their neighbor's troubles, so the injured in that upturned car will be waiting until tomorrow.

But newspapers do come out on Thanksgiving. The newsstand next to the station is closed, and so is the station, although it is lit up as if it were night. It's empty, silent; there are no travelers and no rail workers. I sat on a platform and remained there waiting the rest of the morning. I didn't see a single train. Were they on strike?

Come on. In the history books they say that even long ago during the Great Strike of 1919, the trains were running. Not only are we pious, we are a people of irreproachable services, a society in which labor peace is never disturbed, and the question is whether this is due to worker satisfaction and means the workers feel gratefully affectionate toward the system, with which they zealously cooperate. As for myself, an intellectual, unreceptive monad without obligations, the matter didn't interest me; I instead paid tacit homage to the bourgeois bonhomie (so egotistical, so optimistic, so sturdily nationalistic) that sees a clear blue Alpine lake where another would diagnose a social swamp. Railroads are not highways; they don't destroy the landscape, and that satisfies me.

Once they would have called me *qualunquista*, thirty years ago, a *démobilisateur*.^{*} Such labels are now out of fashion, luckily.

Truth is, and every tourist brochure will tell you so, our trains, from the day they were built, have never stopped running. This shutdown, and the absence of any staff in an important station like Widmad-Lewrosen, seemed very strange, but there was something else no less strange: when I passed by the Trinity Protestant Church, I gave the door a push and found it was locked up tight. I did the same at the Catholic church of St. Vilcifredo. It was open, but empty.

I was tired now, and after the night I'd had, I had a right to be, so I stopped knocking on doors. I took the path back up the mountain in thick fog, about a fifty-minute walk. Whether I wanted to or not, I must go home and—after this interval devoted to others—pick up the conversation with myself.

When you've been through something as deeply personal as I had that night, would *picking up* be painful, exhausting? Above all boring, I'd say.

It's not just the aggressive unresolved problems, but siege by small *beloved* things. Small, clinging family things, objects that grab you, each one with its modest, tenacious prehensile charm. A photograph you took and framed, of April snow on the roof, the little imitation Bokhara rug you bought yourself for Christmas, your typewriter with a sheet of paper springing from the platen. The acetylene hunting lamp you don't need but which looks perfect in the entryway, lit up bright red; the LP of Albinoni's piano sonata. Each one of them with its heartrending appeal, its insidious allure, would like to draw you in, bind you, and is astonished that you were thinking . . . that you tried to . . . that you came back, they say . . . if you're still here, however, it's also because of us. And maybe they even know it's not true, but they have to pretend to be delighted. The truth is, a man who draws back from killing himself does so (and Durkheim didn't see this) under the illusion that there is a third way, but in fact *tertium non datur*—there is no third possibility: it's either a leap into the siphon or a dive back into daily life, where the rhythm of everything has stayed exactly as it was and you must hasten to make up for the progress lost. In seven days, in view of the final solution, I haven't wound the clock or read the papers; it has been seven days since I took a bath, did the household accounts, opened the mail. The mail. Ball and chain, consummate emblem of routine. Proof positive the world exists. Mail announcing meetings, exhibits, and conferences, petty advertising, bimonthly tax statements (June–July), the insurance company with a printed greeting card: "Tomorrow you'll be 40. Our best wishes and some friendly advice, do consider . . ."

Ah, the persecution of those recurrent wishes, for my birthday this time. My exclamatory friend Professor Mylius writes, "You're about to embark on a second childhood, lucky fellow. Not without a little envy, I'd like to reiterate my warmest feelings of friendship." Henriette, for her part: "Sunday June 2 is your day, and I'll be there. Later on, in the early evening, but if you wish I'll stay over until Monday." She didn't show up, actually. A cold, the fog, the trip all the way from Chrysopolis up here. "You *would* hole up at 1,400 meters." Henrietta is my ex. I would describe her, with Flaubert in mind, as a sentimental miseducation. Having dutifully taken my bath, I pick up the notebook left by Frederica in the kitchen. Magazine, x francs; linens, x francs; one new floor mop; four liters milk; eggs, half a dozen.

HERE CONCLUDES the external report on the Event, and the internal one opens. But you won't find me indulging in personal confessions because by now my personal story is history, the history of Mankind. I'm now Mankind, I'm Society (with the capital M and the capital S). I wouldn't be exaggerating if I spoke of myself in the third person: "Mankind said this, did that." Because as of June 2, the third person and any other person, grammatical or existential, has necessarily been my person. There is no longer anything but the I, and the I is no one but me. I am the I.

Monday, June 3, morning: Frederica and Giovanni don't show up, and I get it in my head (it hurts, incidentally; under the bandage the wound throbs, it must be infected) that they've gone to the Monday market down in Widmad. I'll find them there.

Three massifs, each taller than 4,000 meters, stand above the narrow basin that is Widmad; the village sits in the center, and the market at the center of the village. On a clear day, looking up from the old piazza, it hurts to raise your eyes: those looming glaciers are blinding. The other day there was nothing but fog in the little square. The mountains were hidden, the stall owners and the shoppers were invisible too. In the streets and in the houses, shops, and hotels, at the station and the post office, locals and visitors, men, women, and children were nowhere to be seen. An abandoned village, emptied out abruptly of everyone. Emptied in the same way and to the same degree as the nearby village of Lewrosen: no remains and no clues why. There's a keen (you might say, or ironic) absence of explanations. A notice in a shop window catches my eye. The village band plans to ride the cable car at Mountàsc and perform what will be the highest-elevation concert in Europe, at 2,950 meters. The public is invited to enjoy the event "in that enchanting stage set where the snow is eternal." The "show" will take place next Sunday, June 9.

In Widmad I go into the Hôtel Zemmi. (Zemmi is the name of our creek and of the entire valley.) Not a large hotel but an elegant or at least charming one, and never overcrowded, it is a favorite here of the German clientele, with a chef whose substantial, though not outstanding, meals I like, and a new covered swimming pool; the owner, a German named Kaiser, had invited me to the pool's opening some months back. In Kaiser's office on the ground floor next to the stairs, I recognize his leather jacket and sunglasses on the desk. I climb the stairs to the first floor and look into one of the rooms. The bed's unmade, on the bedside table a lamp shines, lighting up a book and a wristwatch. A woman's watch, and the book, in fact, is by Simone de Beauvoir. The reader's not there. Leaving the Zemmi, I stop by to ring the bell at my friend Mylius's house; he, too, is a German, from Göttingen, a professor emeritus, the one who sent me the greetings. No one comes to the door. In Lewrosen there's a boarding school for some twenty or thirty kids; it's open and I walk through from the first to the last room. In the dormitory next to every bunk are the shoes and clothes of each occupant, laid out with soldierly precision and disturbed by nothing and no one. Here, the lights are off, not a voice, not a footstep.

I don't persist in my search. I sit on a bench on the main street of Lewrosen and listen to the silence. Which isn't total, and therefore not frightening. A drainpipe behind me is dripping very slowly; the church carillon gracefully marks the quarter hour and the half; a metal box counts the solitary minutes as a switch flashes, connected to the traffic light at the intersection, which is working, in fact. And yet the silence weighs on me, and I perceive it with a sense that isn't auditory, but perhaps emotional, perhaps thoughtful and reasoning. What produces silence is its opposite, is finally the human presence, whether welcome or not, and its absence. There are no substitutes for those two factors.

And the silence of human absence, I understand, is a silence that doesn't flow. It accumulates.

I have a plan. These people left, I say to myself. They didn't melt. Lower down in the valley, someone will have seen them go by, someone will know something, will explain this to me. So I must follow the road. There's only the one, it continues north toward the plain. A means of transport must be found.

And so here I am in the Lewrosen public garage looking for a car, the only means of transport available. I don't like cars, I've never owned one, but I've occasionally driven a certain inexpensive German make, which suits me on account of its spartan simplicity and rugged fenders. There are a number of them in the garage still running; I take the one closest to me and drive away without much trouble. The road is if anything too empty, and I know every turn of the way. I head downhill and stop at Claus. There's a nursing home for old people there; Mylius, whose ninety-year-old mother is a resident, told me about it. I stop and walk around the home as I did at the school in Lewrosen, room by room, from the dining hall to the infirmary. After the nursing home, I scour the fire station, which is nearby, for firefighters, affectionately called the valley pumpers.

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I was trying to come to terms with the situation, and especially my own, without excessive alarm and without drawing fanciful conclusions. This is not the Antarctic, it's a narrow valley floor on which four thousand people are squeezed together. Even if they were playing hide-and-seek, even if they'd been maliciously smuggled away, someone would reveal themselves in the end.

But nobody let themselves be seen. I was tired of inspecting hotels, hospitals, schools, and fire stations. The spirit of my search had been fairly optimistic until I reached Claus, but discouragement was creeping in, and an ugly rancor. I kept going, making no further stops; at noon I reached the highway and by one PM Chrysopolis was coming into sight: the place where I've lived the longest and which I resolutely detest, the city for which I feel the most heated contempt. Today I'm relieved to see it again.

They wouldn't be my people, but I would find people there. It was a large city, though it wasn't the physical size of the place that reassured me. Its 400,000 merchants make Chrysopolis as positive as positivity itself, amenable to anything at all, apart from miracles. The gold ballast coined in the sacristies of its sixty banks cannot levitate into the realm of the miraculous, not even into the realm of the unexpected. The highest concentration of known wealth in the world is here, matter so concrete that it's impervious to any evil and remains unaffected by heavenly grace or punishment. Its roots tap into the capital's *aeternum*, reality at its utmost.

Returning here (it had been six months since my last visit) after that dream that began on the brink of the siphon, I "made land" and was once again in contact with the solid world. The mystery of my valley, abruptly depopulated, would rapidly be resolved. Risibly. In fact, it would make sense not to mention it, it would be enough to get a person committed. In the Market City, hospitals are strangely numerous. And full.

But whom would I speak to, if I found no signs of life? Everything from the outskirts to the center was shut down, silent, empty. Everything was untouched and in order, but immobile and out of time, because it is humans who lend time to things, and no humans were in sight. Not even one.

I parked the car right on the Börsenplatz, and since I was hungry I gulped down some hot chocolate and biscuits from a machine. Then I waited until three PM, when after-hours trading begins, that is, when the sanctuary celebrates the high mass of the closing of the bids, and the real thing, reserved to the inner circle, takes place, the Rothschild Hour as one of our leading traders calls it, when the financial destiny of Europe and most of the West is decided. But the house of worship is dark, it remains shut. Dead, like the columns of Baalbek.

The city, intact although just abandoned, is already archeology. *They* left no decipherable message. Instead, they left all their things. Made off in great haste with no thought for what was left behind: their treasure.

I went to see the offices of my newspaper. I worked there until quite recently as an occasional contributor. Although under no illusion I'd find someone, I felt the need to supply myself with confirmation. A newspaper is a witness, not just a collection bin of news items. A newspaper cannot desert its post, it must be the conscience reflected by events, and it cannot evade this duty on impulse, even a collective or universal impulse. As long as it lives, it is there, taking notice. As long as it lives.

And it was still, in some way, alive, in the senseless arm-waving of the linotype machines. I said I couldn't erase the image of that gesture. It's true. Even now I see those poor automatons jerking about, prisoners of their own mechanical fidelity.

I'VE TOLD you the rest, delivered my autopsy on the corpse of the city, still warm; related my return to Widmad: the days of extended fear, a fever that wearied the nerves and frustrated an ignominious fantasy life. Days and nights to write off as a plunge into the subhuman, into abject, shameless misery.

Ironically it was a clownish incident that cured me (temporarily). Like something out of an old farce.

In my house there's a storeroom that faces onto the woods, where the door is always partly ajar. Venturing in there to get an armful of wood for the stove, I found one of Giovanni's cows. The cow, *animal bibliophagum*, was eating my *Psychology of the Conscious Mind*, softbound copies with a green cover, a package of thirty or so sent by my publisher to distribute to friends—they were on a shelf. She was munching on them quite happily, a greenish mush dripping off one hairy lip onto the floor, which was scattered with clumps of wet pages. My laughter was edged with hysteria, but it relieved me. The fearful paralysis dissolved in grateful tenderness. I patted that beast, feeding quite unmetaphorically on my paperbound thoughts made words. I'd get them back tomorrow, supposing I succeeded in milking her, my ideas finally remunerative.

The next day I went down the path to Widmad on legs that were not too shaky. I went there with a plausible, if obvious plan: to telephone the world. There must be—must survive—a world beyond my valley and beyond the Golden City.

At two in the afternoon, Widmad is slicked with rain, geraniums flowering under red and green roofs. It looks unnatural, but as always, excessively perfect, like an advertising brochure. In the cemeterial hush, there's not even the tiniest note of decay. An outbuilding of the Kursaal hosts an art exhibit. Behavior-Art, I'd gone to the opening, and it was what I'd expected. The Spanish artist Luis Lugán was showing bathtub faucets which, when you opened them, emitted electronic music by Krzysztof Penderecki, *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* for fifty-two string instruments. Cardenet, a Frenchman, had two young women (live ones, you know) drinking an aperitif on a transparent slab suspended three meters above the floor. The women (who are no longer there) wore no panties. Artist Jean Le Gac displayed an automobile with the doors open and the two left tires flat. Mattiaci, Italian: a composition titled *Space*, a glass table with a telephone on top "connected to the whole of Europe" and phone books from "the whole of Europe." A viewer could speak to anyone he or she wished for ten seconds, paying off-peak rates. Yes, this communicative work of art was just what I needed.

To be certain the phone was working I once again dialed The Exact Time. I was given the time, and then began to call all over: Frankfurt (West Germany), Brighton (United Kingdom), Bologna (Italy), Boulogne (France), places and people with whom I'd occasionally been in correspondence in the past months and whose telephone numbers I had in my notebook. After that, I began to pick numbers at random from the phone books. I called three belonging to unknown Parisians. No answer, not even there. They, too, were silent. I tried Paris again, dialing Dr. Ahmed Ibn Yussef, 142 boulevard de la Poissonnière. A medical man, a dental surgeon. O sweet luck, what delight: I hear a voice. A graceful female voice (Ahmed's wife?) tells me: *Le Docteur va rentrer ce soir a six heures. Veuillez bien me donner votre numéro ou adresse. Si au contraire vous préférez . . .* that's all. Of course, the allotted ten seconds have expired. I copy down Ahmed's number and run, I race, to the Hôtel Mayr in front of the Kursaal. From the porter's desk—he is, or he was, Battaglia, a friend of mine—I call back. I hear the same voice, and I interrupt her right off. "Madame, can you tell me whether things are normal in Paris?" She replies, "The doctor will return at six PM this evening. Please leave your number or address. If instead, you prefer—" I hang up. It isn't the dentist's wife and it's not his secretary. It's a recorded message.

My lack of success doesn't demoralize me. It goads me on: I will go myself, in person, to 142 boulevard de la Poissonnière. Immediately. On the first flight leaving Teklon. If things are normal in Paris, there are still other questions to be answered, of course, but if the events of these days are localized, I can accept them. A sudden trip appeals to me. Running away. A detail I should mention: Although I've traveled all over Europe and a good part of the United States, I've never been to Paris. I have no money on me, so I ask the absconder Battaglia for a loan. His tips from June 1 are in the drawer at reception, a sum that's more than enough. I leave a note of explanation for my cash withdrawal, and take off in my little car, which is waiting for me where I left it in the middle of the street three days before.

Teklon is Chrysopolis's airport, closer to me, coming from the mountains, than it is to the city. I'm there in half an hour. This is one of Europe's crossroads, an intercontinental jumping-off point. But today it isn't crowded.

It's empty. Empty of people. The gates, the corridors, the ticket windows, the customs hall, the

baggage claim, the bar, the restaurant (where some years back I waited half a day for an aircraft that turned out to have been hijacked): no one. Should I have foreseen this? I don't know. However, I'm now in the recovery phase and feel optimistic; consulting one of the many departure boards that are lit up, I see that in the next three hours, a number of planes are arriving and departing from the four corners of the globe. In the space of fifty minutes there are flights to Paris from Zagreb, from Nairobi via Cairo and Rome, and from Athens, as well as a charter "on which some seats may be available." Here we face paralysis, or the desert, for some unknown reason, but in Nairobi, Cairo, Athens, the world is still in motion. What I've been calling, with sociological nonchalance, the D-Bomb (rapid and thorough depopulation) or the R-Bomb (perfect rarefaction) may have gone off at Chrysopolis and environs, but it cannot have affected aircraft traveling over the Mediterranean at 10,000 meters, or across the Sudan.

By now it's seven PM; I'm still waiting. In the car, I venture out into the airport's crepuscular enormity. The takeoff runway is unencumbered, but not the landing lanes. A number of planes sit on the tarmac, one practically on top of the other, sideways. Closest to me, and I recognize it because I've flown on one, an Aeroflot Tupolev has rolled off the runway, mowing down the grass for quite some distance. Stopped now, nose down, tail section raised to a whitish, uninviting sky it won't be slicing through again, it seems. However, I'm not ready to concede. This place is by its nature extra-territorial; it belongs to the planetary universe and its infinitely far horizons. Short of some global cataclysm, life must somewhere reveal itself, someone must sooner or later materialize from on high and attempt to dock. The lights flickering on the fuselage will appear and if the fog prevents that, I'll hear the roar of the engines. I won't sleep, I'll stay on sentry, I'll listen.

And in fact, I didn't sleep. Long after midnight, sprawled in a chair in the main ticket office, I grew weary of paging through old newspapers and went outside. Once again to the runways, where the whiteness of the lights is vaguely sealike. I made myself walk to the distant hangar area, and went inside one, naïvely astonished at its cathedral dimensions. The lights and the immensity of it were blinding, I sought the shadow under a wing. Tall castles laced with stairs and laden with instruments laid siege to an aircraft body. An official inspection, interrupted suddenly (is that allowed? why?); oil or kerosene is dripping through the landing gears and spreading out in sinister, iridescent pools. I am smoking, and draw back, trembling. The cathedral, supported by a maze of the finest openwork steel struts, is beautiful. The sight invigorates me—technophobia be damned; the structure ennobles its builders, and makes me believe human beings cannot be extinguished—just as the Christians threatened by the Turks at Constantinople would go and look upon their glorious Hagia Sofia, and from those domes and columns draw auspices of salvation.

Morning arrives, and the portents are not favorable. I'm still waiting. Camping out as best I can in a chair with sandwiches and beer and the paperbacks I took from the newsstand, in my bones a queasy feeling of sleep repressed, in my nerves tension and worry. But I hold out. Imagining long sequences of hijackings. Simultaneous strikes by the pilots, the customs agents, the barmen, and the newsstand owners. I pretend not to notice that for eighteen hours I have been waiting strictly alone, that the great hall and the various spaces I've been walking through are abandoned, as are the bar tables with their layer of thick dust, on which my finger, motivated by the usual fool reflex, traces the letter H, the initial of my ex's name, over and over.

From Nairobi—I begin to chant—from Cairo, Zagreb, Caracas, Athens. To Paris, Tehran, Montreal, Moscow.

NO, I AM not some comic Alceste le Misanthrope.* I am, on and off, an Anthropophobe, I'm *afraid* of people, as I am of rats and mosquitoes, afraid of the nuisance and the harm of which they are untiring agents. This is not the only reason, but it's one of them, why I seek solitude, a solitude (in the modest limits of the possible) that is genuine, i.e., extensive and abiding. But now that *they* are playing hard to get, or are trying to, anyway, I'm beginning to reevaluate their importance.

Names like Meggy Weiss Lo Surdo, Ahmed Ibn Yussef, and Mark W. Black have a new significance.

I'm about to leave the airport. Next to the stairs I see two suitcases and an olive-green duffel marked with its owner's name: Sgt. Mark W. Black, 128 Pioneers Sect., Eleventh Army US Forces in Europe. And there, beyond the forlorn suitcases, sits a jeep with assorted American military insignia: white star, bison, tomahawk, etc. The fortuitous encounter with Sergeant Black makes up my mind. Fate has decreed I must make another search and has supplied me with the fuel. Literally: the jeep is carrying two canisters of gasoline, which I use to fill up my tank.

That Eleventh's base, a stone's throw from my home, made the papers a few months ago. There was a mutiny by the soldiers of color. (The sergeant wasn't one of them; Black is as white as I am and he furnished the proof with a photo collection of young black women in scanty clothing, found in his army duffel bag.) The base is over the border of course. My country is the only one in the West *not* to host the American military within its territory.

It's one of my home borders, one that I, neither a tourist nor a traveler, often cross. It's seventy kilometers north of Chrysopolis, ninety from the airport. I drive up, slamming the brakes on sleepily, the gray entry lanes empty, and discover one positive effect of the exodus, or X-Bomb, or Operation House Cleaning: the frontiers are wide open, the great dream of supranational unity has been realized. I merely have to get out of the car and raise the entry bar. Guards and inspections are no longer needed, and in fact there aren't any, neither on one side nor on the other.

America go home: the usual graffiti accompanies me. Thanks to a *No Entry* sign I recognize the road that leads to the base, which as it winds down becomes a Sunset Boulevard, with mini-skyscrapers, villas, and semi-detached dwellings, playgrounds and parks, swimming pools, and a bowling alley. Even a few out-of-place palm tufts. The sentry boxes in front of the immense gate contain no sentries (their weapons, yes), probably because of the hour. It's midday. I walk around the fence, which extends for many kilometers, and find an opening, as expected. Every encampment of every army in the world has its clandestine entry points and the Eleventh's base has quite a few, including one big enough to admit an automobile. I drive through and explore the village street by street, sundering the deep silence, passing rows of enormous bourgeois Chevrolets lined up neatly along the sidewalks. I coast by office buildings, warehouses, workshops, make a turn—and find other office buildings, other flowerbeds, other warehouses, other Chevrolets, a mirror image that fades into the mist.

Here and there instead of asphalt under my tires, there's a steel platform as big as a tennis court: these must cover the cellars where the base hides its big guns, its tanks, transport vehicles, missiles. Aboveground, there is nothing to be seen; the base looks more like a factory making thermometers than a fortress full of military machinery. My pacifist amazement is that of the Capuchin friar on a mission to Hong Kong's red-light district who finds nothing but fans and paper flowers, not one bed or sofa. But curiosity and amazement are merely superficial responses. Deep down, cold confirmation: the base has been evacuated. Not one man is on duty here. A sudden command from the Pentagon has put its guns and flowerbeds off duty. I stop, get out of the car and enter one of the buildings, a low white edifice. It's a club for the troops; in the entryway, helmets and sub-machine guns hang on a rack.

A patrol has interrupted its rounds to sit in the cafeteria; there are bottles of beer and Coca-Cola on the tables, half-eaten hot dogs, playing cards, and magazines. Piles of trays on side tables, TV sets, a pool table. A calendar on the wall between two windows marks, for my exclusive benefit, the last day the place was occupied, June 1. Since then, no one has torn off the pages, and nobody has given a thought to the parrot either. The unfortunate, foul-smelling mascot lies dead as a doornail in its cage under the flag. America has gone home at last, it seems.

I, too, leave. Drive back up Sunset Boulevard. Head toward the border.

I know my way around these parts, but fog and fatigue plot against me. I take the wrong turn, can't find the border, and at a certain point the road is blocked by two vans that have run into each other. My headlights illuminate, but don't deter, the columns of rats that come and go from one of the vehicles, which seems to have been transporting some delicacy they like. The cabins of the two vans are twisted

together like “the hair of Medusa” as newspaper accounts of such accidents always say. At least I don’t have to feel bad about the “unlucky drivers.” As of June 2, traffic accidents have been bloodless, just as the American army bases are harmless. I simply turn the car around and go back the way I came. I have no idea where I am heading, and there’s not a living soul who can tell me.

But I’m lucky. After driving at length—twenty or thirty kilometers perhaps—I come to something I recognize: an arch over the road, which narrows into a bridge. A wooden bridge, covered by a pitched wooden roof. I’m certain: This is Tuti’s, Tuti’s village, or town, if you will. In my memory (I haven’t been back here for I don’t know how many years) it’s called Tuti’s. My girlfriend of long ago, named Tuti, still lives here. A teacher or school principal, and certainly still on her own as she was then. The last time she wrote (a postcard) she was living just across the road from the old monastery. I’ll go find her.

The street lights are on. I find the main square with ease; on one side is the Emperor’s Tower where Henri de Luxembourg was kept prisoner. I pass the school where I myself was a prisoner, a schoolboy aged thirteen to sixteen, and recognize the narrow street where my immigrant father had his electrician’s shop, and where he kept us, the family, on the mezzanine above. I enter and walk down the low covered porticos, tip my imaginary hat to the movie theater with its fading Marlon Brandos and Marcello Mastroiannis, coast along the city park with its lawns and linden trees, for me once the immense world of nature. And there on a small knoll is the dark mass of the old monastery, already a military base in my day. Tuti’s house is smaller than I expected, shut up tight; no balconies, no geraniums, more hermetic and sealed than I’d imagined. Even the Eleventh Army’s base is less stingy with its secrets.

In this part of town, it occurs to me just now, the houses have backyards with vegetable plots and gardens that give on to the river. I walk down to the river, and turn back upstream, hoist myself over a gate. Through a darkened passageway, and I’m inside the house. I search for a light switch and find one. A teacher, or principal, forty-seven years old, unmarried, cannot *not* be within the domestic walls at five in the afternoon on an ordinary Tuesday. And she’s there, I can see the chain inside the front door. “It’s me,” I say, loudly. “You weren’t expecting me, were you?”

But I find I’m hungry. In the kitchen I take cheese, wine, and a slice of tarte aux pommes, delicious, from the refrigerator. The bread, however, is already stale. “Excuse me if I serve myself,” I say toward the stairs, mouth full. While I’m eating, I move into the sitting room to explore. Some French novels and textbooks on the sideboard, a vase of wilted flowers, a plush box with dozens of letters and postcards (I look through them, letters from alumni and colleagues, none of the few postcards I sent in reply to hers over the past twenty years), a case with a collection of rocks and minerals, some school records. My postcards, maybe a photo of me clipped from the newspaper, are hidden away. Upstairs, in a locked drawer, isn’t that right, Tuti?

In one corner, the armchair and floor lamp for evening reading sessions. On the wallpaper with its minute figures, some Alpine views and a reproduction of a fresco in the Sistine Chapel. The décor is highly indicative of the inhabitant, her tastes and her profession. No TV; the woman is intelligent and no conformist, except when strictly necessary. I finish my meal. I’ve eaten well.

Now I climb the stairs, slowly. I know she’ll be there, slight, blonde, quiet as ever; I turn on the light at the doorway. And she is there. In some ways there: in the mark of her head on the pillow, and on the still-made bed, covers neatly tucked in, the slight weight of her body visible. I sit down near the bed, near my poor Tuti. The little woman—not my first love, I was already expert in falling in love—of my first climax, to whom I sacrificed (aggressively) my fifteen-year-old virginity. She, older (old and not beautiful in my eyes) was in love, although she was not more expert at it than I. My lust without intimacy, the speed with which I was satisfied, wounded her deeply, this I knew: I was aware of it and pleased. And she, aware and not pleased to see me again—me, so colorless, so changed—does not let herself be seen.

This is not a deathbed. And soon I’ll stretch out on it, familiarly, and will sleep a delicious long sleep, making up for that night wasted at the airport, foolishly waiting. Tuti isn’t dead.

She didn’t get sick and pass away, didn’t suffer the angst, the agony of death. Didn’t leave the town that (for me) takes her name, didn’t leave her home, or her room. And therefore she is here, even if hiding from my senses, my sight. She won’t let me touch her hair, perhaps still blonde. I take off my shoes and my jacket, lie down in my trousers with suspenders. Forgive me, Tuti.

AROUND the middle of May, the snow melts at the Malga Ross. I was sprawled out on the grass under the steep rock face, with no company but the skinny larch tree or two that has the nerve to push up at that altitude. A windy morning. The cave of the siphon, June 2, they were still in the future, and I was indulging in my usual pastime: parenthesizing the existence of my fellow humans, imagining myself as the only thinking being in an utterly empty universe. Empty of human beings, that is. Allow me to prettify my interior thoughts with some pedantry: Hegel dreamed of the Real in and for itself; for me the Real was *of and for myself*, where others take no part, because they don't exist.

Hegel and the Romantics, it remains unclear why, identified the Real with the Subject, while I prefer to think of it as perfectly objective. But mine, however, exclusively mine.

In that final phase of a fairly perverse thought process, I had managed to persuade myself that I really was alone. Alone in the world. If I'm not mistaken this is called, in philosophical jargon, *solipsism*: I, the individual, and my vision of things, no other, nothing else. But it wasn't philosophy that interested me (it never has interested me much). I was *living* this. I got up from the grass and embraced the larch trees, something I used to do as a boy and for the same reason: to allow myself to be penetrated by their life force. At other times I was convinced I was a Celt, and worshiped those trees the way the Celts worshiped the oak. At yet other times, I was moved by pure enthusiasm.

My enthusiasms, furthermore, were and are genuine; there never was anything literary about them. I never extracted a single sentence from my pangs of solitude, never felt gratified by them. There was no need; the experience was deep and demanded no reflection or communication. Nor did I ever imagine I was the only person to experience such states. In fact, the matter must be very old, for in ancient times a sin for which there is no forgiveness was spoken of.

I didn't hesitate to involve God in this, either. I even prayed, impiety all too evident, for his kingdom to arrive. Today, outside my house and not far from Frederica and Giovanni's (empty) one, I thanked him, not just faithlessly but cruelly, for having answered my prayer, as I stood under my open umbrella, handkerchief at my nose, a cold just beginning. Alone at last: wish granted. Meanwhile thinking to myself that I must be crazy not to have some aspirin on hand.

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Anyone who subscribes to the doctrine of incommunicability would object: you've always been alone. False. The whistling noise made by the cabin of the cable car as it sailed insolently close to the tops of the fir trees: it was there and now it's not. The irruptions of Henriette, my ex; the boys from the school in Widmad out on a Sunday hike; books sent with appeals to review them. The checkup visits by Dr. P., who comes to me if I fail to show up at the clinic where they carry out the prescribed exams.

Having gotten past the siphon, I dive into the Lake of Solitude. And also into the mess that's accumulating at home. The kitchen sink is clogged; my bed's become a pigsty. The scales of bourgeois conformity fall off. The dirt grows thicker. There is no one to change my clothes for. The only reason I shave is because the sharp beard hairs bother me at night while I'm sleeping. I'll keep it up as long as the razor works, and the electricity.

They used to say that thanks to automation, electric power stations could continue operating for months even if there were no workers. That seems to be the case.

In the living quarters of Kaiser, the owner of the Hôtel Zemmi, I found a highly sensitive and precise Japanese radio and spent half a day and most of the night tuning it to every station in Europe. And the world. Beginning with a socialist country and its tireless station that broadcasts twenty-four hours a day. The device works perfectly, every station has its own distinctive bleat, whine, crackle, or whistle. But no voices. Not one bar of music. Not even a jingle from the universal ether.

Relief. Nothing merciless about it, it's like the expression "At least he's no longer suffering," which family members say of some poor fellow who has finally decided to give up the ghost. In the technological age, when the radio universe goes silent, civilization, so-called, must also be suspended, if not extinguished; the Organization, deadly cryptogam spread over five continents, must be dissolved; and the octopus of the Economy must cease to send out its myriad filthy tentacles. At two AM I shut down the sophisticated Japanese receiver and improvised in its presence a eulogy to humans. A requiem to ideology, opium of the people; a requiem to consumerism, their poisoned bread. A requiem to the false credo, "You are the product of Production"; a requiem to the mournful and stupid war cry *politique d'abord*, politics above all. O people of the earth, exult for me but also for yourselves, or for your

surrogate given that you will not profit from this liberation. Not that it comes too late, no. You willed your own slavery, you designed it. The only way it can disappear is if you do.

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Strictly speaking, the fact that everyone has disappeared is still to be proven. In Greenland or down in the Antipodes, shall we say on the Trobriand Islands, there may still be thinking beings like myself alive. Nevertheless, any survivors would be unable to signal their presence in any way—and as far as I'm concerned, that settles it.

The axioms of communications theory are of no use, I see immediately, things like *the medium is the message*, although the corollary is unquestionable: no medium, no message. However, not only the means of transmission (news) have come to a halt, but also the means of transport (persons). Supposing that in the Trobriands, or in Hudson Bay,* some stubborn tribe has survived. Not only can I not travel to them, they cannot travel to me. We won't catch sight of each other, won't meet, won't annoy one another. They are dead to me, and I to them.

(And do the Trobriands really exist, or did Bronisław Malinowski* simply deduce them from the twin myths of the Good Savage and the Fortunate Isles? That is, Lévy-Bruhl* being the sole other who confirms they exist.)

(The two discoverers don't agree, however, for Malinowski maintains that the Trobrianders are joyously sociable and enjoy a refined poetic sensibility, while Lévy-Bruhl holds they are superstitious and foolish. The illustrious scholars' discordant duet is to my mind one of the great gems of modern anthropology. Priceless.)

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Right now I'm following the path below the escarpment along the train tracks. Between Widmad and the outskirts of Lewrosen.

Without seeking it, I've found proof that the Event is not an illusion, not just my own invention. A family of chamois goats is walking along the tracks. Two females, a male, and kids. They've come down from the mountains, something that's never happened before in human memory. For that matter I've seen other good omens too: the birds are making an unholy racket, and their numbers have grown. Especially the nocturnal species that have come back in droves, which pleases me because I've always appreciated their musical talents.

Owls of all kinds, wood, tawny, long-eared, little. Their instincts tell them something they certainly never expected: the great enemy has withdrawn. The air is clear of smoke and fumes, the earth no longer stinks or quakes with terrible noises. (Humans, you want to fight pollution? Simple: eliminate the polluting breed.) Perhaps this glimpse of spring, albeit cold and fogbound, has encouraged them too. At sunset yesterday, I listened to a duet between two little owls, quite a bit more musical than Lévy and Malinowski. One of the two (the female?) distinguished her voice by keeping her call a half-tone off that of her companion, and never varied the sequence except at long intervals, generally the same each time. The melopoeia, the melodies, are very simple but not, as most say, lugubrious. I joined in, not trying to imitate, repeating a low note barely in tune with theirs, an organ drone. I also tried some dissonant notes. It didn't seem to displease them, they approached me. We have things in common: we share the woods and the night, I'm nearly as much a *nictalope* and a noctivagant, a nighthawk, as they are, and if I sing, I sing at night. Except that my vocal cords, unlike theirs, have undergone the nicotine treatment.

There I was, commenting on, exorcizing, the end of the world. Or whatever this thing is that's happening in front of my eyes.

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The end of the world?

One of the pranks played by anthropocentrism is to suggest that the end of our species will bring about the death of animal and vegetable nature, the end of the earth itself. The fall of the heavens. There is no eschatology that doesn't assume man's permanence is necessary to the permanence of everything else. It's accepted that things might have begun before us; unthinkable that they could ever end *after* us. Old Montaigne, who thought of himself as agnostic, agreed with the dogmatics, the theologians, on this point. *Ainsi fera la morte de toutes choses notre mort*. Our death will bring about the death of all things.

Come on, you clever, presumptuous fellows, you make too much of yourselves. The world has never been so alive as it is since a certain breed of bipeds disappeared. It's never been so clean, so sparkling, so

good-humored.

I CAN THINK of numerous others of my professional tribe, who, even supposing they were able to imagine my present situation, would say that it was unbelievable except as irony and farce. That it could only work as a medium for social satire.

But that very vision of the thing, far from being a clever paradox, is merely idiotic.

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I, instead, find myself asking if this is not a dream.

It's a question as ordinary and human as yawning, one that gets snagged, however, in the thick foliage of the forest of speculation. I go over Pascal's objections to Descartes (in my memory, because I have no books; when I came up here, I chose not to bring even one). Descartes argued that he was unable to determine that experience is real and dreams are not; Pascal replied that our immediate and infallible sensations (*notre coeur*, he said) alone prove that experience is one thing, and dreams another thing, or *no-thing*. I touch my head, find the scar from the hardy blow against the rock in the cave of the siphon on the fateful night between June 1 and 2. Pascal is right, I think.

Once I used to be even more empirical than he; in my mind, facts, objectivity were no more than a *rassemblement des subjectivités*, a *consensus opinantium*.^{*} If we agree that we must, at certain intervals, pay our taxes and light the wood stove, it means that the tax collector and the cold are not products of the imagination but things to take seriously. But now the question at hand is to determine whether the "opiners," an entire species except for one, have disappeared, a point on which I cannot expect the response of the same opiners but must evaluate the situation for what it is. The situation is certainly peculiar, even inexplicable: does that mean it isn't real? Only optimists ever fooled themselves thinking that the real was rational, and I have never been an optimist. Now, I'm beginning to convert to simpleminded realism. The real, when it has duration and consistency on its side (consistency meaning uniformity and solidity) can enjoy the luxury of being irrational and unexplainable. Even stark raving mad, if need be.

I'm not battling inexplicability.

I possess none of the wishful thinking of science, and none, to my credit, of science fiction either. I don't fall back on genocide by death rays, or epidemics spread around Earth by tiny, evil Venusians, or clouds of nuclear fallout from distant H-bombs. I sensed right off that the Event cannot be gauged by the usual measures. *Scire nefas*: it is forbidden, it is not yours to know.^{*} Let me add: *ridere licet* (it's permissible to laugh), given that I (I) am the Spectator.

Yesterday for the first time I broke into the house of my "shepherds," forcing the shutters on a window. I'd already opened the barn to let the animals out. The shepherds' house was in order. Giovanni and Frederica, like the others, were taken in their sleep, and the bedcovers of the wide marital bed were still in place, tucked around people no longer there. There was a slight depression left when they were "extracted" from their places; they didn't step down from the bed laterally as one does on arising. And after they were extracted, how and where did they go out? The door remains locked from the inside, the key in the lock.

They volatilized and then were sucked out of bed and out of the house, maybe up the chimney? In that case, I think, the process may not be irreversible. Or not altogether irreversible.

In April there was a symposium of the National Society of Meta- and Para-Psychic Sciences in Widmad. Little more than a month later, I'm moving in a dimension that would seem to be exquisitely metapsychic. Sadly, I won't be able to pursue it. A certain Karotz spoke at the closing session of the conference, the only one that I, not an adept, attended. In essence, what he said was: the operators of our science have to work together; individuals can't carry out the metapsychic praxis. It's a social and collective exercise; the Spirit reveals itself when two or three come together in its name.

Therefore, I will never master it. Pointless to hope for re-evocations, re-incorporations, replies from wobbling tables. One must be in company around the table. Ideally after an excellent lunch.

Giovanni was small and plump. (Large bovine eyes, bright blue and watery.) I'd be curious to see what ectoplasm model he's wearing now.

The colleague who accused me of reductionism knew me well. I erred, I sinned and continue to commit the sin of simplification. What for anyone else would be an ocean of negativity, an utter horror, is something I'm able to float on in a paper boat. A boat made of a few, mediocre, at times ironic, general

ideas.

(Here my avarice of feeling assists me, blunting reaction. A measured, stubborn, native insensibility.)

Let me try to put aside the mediocre general ideas.

Giovanni and his wife vanish from their bed. Now, this notion that humanity has vaporized and is then diffused, dissolved in the atmosphere, is one that had already occurred to me and that I'd rejected. However, it agrees with the facts. It's crazy, but what isn't crazy here? The old paradigms, tried and true, are no longer useful; something else is needed.

Volatilization—why? Well, it could be a reaction of Nature, or of some sort of extra-nature, to the materiality *they* were locked in. A subhuman materialism, according to the moralists. A dense, obtuse materialism, both in the West (practice) and the East (doctrine).

According to the existentialist Berdyaev, extreme sociology brings forth extreme individualism. In an analogous, well-calculated reprisal, extreme materialism could bring forth immaterialism. Ontological.

A world of pure body, believing only in the tangible, is disembodied. *Contraria per contraria expiantur*.^{*} But I have never set stock in atonement, in expiation; or punishment, or retribution, either in this temporal world or higher up.

I prefer the game of dialectics. So that if those opposites can be called antagonists, then in something like equivalent terms, I have the materialism of the real and the realists on the one side opposing the spiritualism of the ideal and the idealists on the other. Thesis, antithesis, and as a synthesis, bodies that volatilize. The triad seems to work here; a neo-Hegelian would approve.

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I do have to live, eat. I get my provisions from the refrigerators and the cellar of the Hôtel Mayr. All the hotels make themselves generously available (wide open as they are since June 2), but I prefer the Mayr; it has a good selection of wines, dessert wines like Moscato di Pantelleria, and fortified wines, like sherry and port. Stuff that suits me. I walk through the hall and in the vestibule there are (in no particular order) the suitcases belonging to a Swedish gentleman, or lady, who arrived at night, it appears; a car (his or hers) with an S plate, still standing outside in front of the steps, the trunk open, filling up with rain. I go down the service stairway and in the kitchen I fill up my bag, carefully closing it, the good housewife conserving her victuals as best she can. One of these times, on my way out after having “shopped” at the Mayr, I had a sudden hallucination.

It was mostly auditory, and not at all pathological, a brief, enjoyable dream with my eyes open. Why it happened there, I have no idea. A reminder of some other setting (I was in the hotel hall), or object, or maybe odor? I don't know, but if I had any doubts about the reality I'm living in, the sweet, imprecise, vague unreality of the vision I was treated to would worry them out of me. I saw myself again in the villa on the lake, where between one spring and fall I was cured of two mild illnesses at once: my youth (I checked in on my twenty-ninth birthday), and an obsessive neurosis.

Wanhoff's clinic, private, known as Villa Verde. So much green, so much darkness, so much desolation. If it hadn't been for Karpinsky . . .

I was hearing a voice, his: Karpinsky, the doctor who cured me, an intelligent man. Independent-minded, or anyway a nonconformist. Humane. Maybe that was why they didn't like him. Recently hired by the clinic and already on his way to being let go (he left the place before I did), Karpinsky was badly treated by Wanhoff, badly paid, badly regarded, but these were facts I learned from others, not from him. He was content with his job, seemed satisfied, and in any case didn't speak about himself.

I saw his lean face with a brown beard (a nice, thick beard, which on him appeared fateful, stigmatic); his smallish and not very well-fed person next to me, who was tall and solid. He lay his two hands on my chest (something he wouldn't have permitted himself when I knew him in the clinic), clinging to the lapels of my jacket. I listened to his soundless speech, I understood the meaning. He encouraged me as he once had: “You will get well, believe me.” A heterodox physician, with a degree from Vienna on the epistolary relationship between Freud and Jung, willing to dispense with psychoanalysis.^{*} No couch; he spoke to his patients, slowly and persuasively; no questioning, no necktie complex, no bric-a-brac. A week later, after having considered the matter, he offered his conclusions.

“I won't conceal from you that yours is no intellectual neurasthenia, nor is it a mere neurosis. It is a federation of neuroses. Some of them uncommon, such as the pyrophobia or the obsessive-compulsive drive that when you leave the house makes you check four times to be sure that the gas and electricity are turned off. Even so, if you want to get well, you will. It depends on you, on a decision that I ask you to make this very instant.” In my vision, or involuntary evocation, or apparition, I heard him repeat those words. But the voice was alive.

I can't say I've ever forgotten the cast of characters at Villa Verde; I remember them well, beginning with Wanhoff, the director who gave his name, informally, to the place, down to the "guests," among them Mylius. But now I'm rediscovering one of them. Who's been interiorized, actualized. Who comes alive as vivid experience, nothing to do with mere memory.

Karpinsky, so different from the industrialists of the early detection diagnosis business. He was paternal (although younger than I). He would come to see me in the evening when I was already in bed, would pick up the phone and order me hot chocolate. "Drink it, and turn off the lights," he'd say. "Turn off the lights and detach your ego, think of anything but yourself." Not a man to soften his message, he'd sometimes say, "That establishment on the other side of the lake," which was a sanatorium for tubercular patients, "is more cheerful than this place, and easier to get out of. But you will get out, if you assist me."

He was younger than I. Two years later, just by chance, I had word of his death. He had leapt into the middle of a fight between two nurses in the district mental asylum, and was stabbed with a knife. Internal hemorrhage, twenty-four hours, and he was gone.

He didn't drink and ate little; what he did like were Gauloises (his fingers were yellow with nicotine) and powerful motorbikes. Carlini, Wanhoff's bursar, would lend him his, and Karpinsky would go off on long nighttime expeditions. Two hundred, three hundred kilometers.

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The hallucination dissolves, and I come to in the hall of the Mayr stumbling over the suitcases of the Swedish guest, or at the bottom of the siphon, or the Lake of Solitude with my nostalgia for Dr. Karpinsky, who I realize, now that it's so late, was my only friend, before and after the Wanhoff.

Now that it's so late. The pathos of some cheap song, but it's what I feel. Meanwhile people and acts—or things that happened to me—that were far more intimate are filed away in my memory and stir no echo. Every day I pass by the villa where, a few summers ago, the redheaded Henriette and I took up with each other.

It was a pointlessly beautiful evening and I was walking with her in the pine wood behind the house, and she told me that she found it strange that our relationship was "so neutral." Platonic, that is. She (she went on) was burning with desire *to be mine*.

That's how she said it, that tired colloquial expression, so false in the physiological sense. Twenty minutes after I'd regularized our situation, she told me candidly, and on the spot, that the desire she'd been feeling was really a need to "discard" me. I laughed, but I shouldn't have, for this time Henriette spoke her mind. On the whole, the wish to materially possess a thing or a person conceals an intention to free oneself of them and move on to something else. What we have possessed we can put behind us, put in the past, the already done. Nice work, Henriette.

IN THIRTY centuries men have unleashed some five thousand wars. They're guilty (as Albert Camus had it) of *persevering* at history, even if they didn't start it. I don't condemn them.

Their worst crime, or anyway the most recent, is the uglification of the world. Other associated offenses often attached: pollution, provocation (a euphemism, better known as *violence*), inflation (no euphemism, the monetary plague).

I don't condemn them. Perhaps it's enough for me to see Chrysopolis reduced to Necropolis. It's a fitting punishment, to my mind. Beyond the ideological satisfaction, I would paraphrase what some Bolshevik said of St. Petersburg in 1917: "Destroy this city and this city alone in order to destroy the past—and all the rest may remain."

I don't condemn *them*, with the exception of Chrysopolis. I did not condemn them, I did not judge them. In my court, the only guilty parties are environmental conditions, and chromosomes. It is they who make history and persevere at it.

Today, I would say more; as of the night of June 2, I'm full of admiration. After so many gaffes their departure was quite elegant.

They left no trace. A fact that would delight a spiritualist; in other words, life was not tied to organic material, to weight and corruption. Myself, I can't help thinking their elegance risks blurring into comedy, into a hoax well perpetrated, finesse on the verge of gimmickry.

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I could consign them to nothingness. Or worse, cast them before time into that extremely orderly chaos, entropy. But instead I'm optimistic. My long-ago theological frequentations encourage me to think they'll come to a positive end. Maybe too much so. Their disappearance will end in glory. It was intended to be remunerative.

That they suffered, lived with woes of every kind, of that I'm sure. *Kosmos olos en tò ponerò keitai*: The whole world lies in wickedness.* "Wickedness" not in the moral sense, you understand; moral wickedness begins and ends with moralism. Genuine wickedness is misery, suffering. It is an individual who suffers, deprived of what he needs in order *to be*. And in this strict and concrete sense, wickedness besieged them from every side, at every instant, in their every act and their every thought—given that fear, the expectation of suffering, is the perfect form of suffering. They were marinated in it, purified by it, utterly unable to know that, or will it. The times were ripe for recompense, the right of human beings to live in balance among their kind was finally to be recognized, realized. June 2 at 2 AM was the zero hour: humanity, angelicized en masse (as it were), rose up to the empyrean. It happened in silence. In silence and without any rhetoric, for once. Souls taking flight, coloring the night sky white.

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But speculation about the causes of the Event is not what's bothering me. The Event, this *Exitus de Aegypto*, presents more urgent problems.

I am a Crusoe whose Robinsonade may seem rather effortless under the circumstances. However, I do face some minor difficulties. I must think about what to do when the light (electric) fails me. I've been stockpiling candles. I didn't find any at the Grand Emporium, although I rummaged through the place. I had to take them from St. Vilcifredo, the Catholic church. Packs of them. The cow—she hasn't strayed from the house of my (her) shepherds, and circles around it, making do with the grass that grows between the pines—won't let me milk her, and I'm longing for fresh milk. Assuming she is a cow, and not a virginal heifer. Her udder is small and wrinkled. This summer solstice is rainy and cold, and I go out with my hatchet to get wood for the stove. Although I usually settle for picking up twigs and branches from the ground.

And I'm keeping myself under observation.

I'm the testing ground in a completely new, rather extreme, and fatiguing situation. I'm experimental material of a certain interest. I'm not entirely devoid of competence here; I've got some experience, have done some scribbling about psychology, if only as provocation. What I don't have is an appetite for myself. I've been flirting with solipsism for a very long time, but I'm neither introverted nor introspective. If you think about it, solipsism and introversion really have nothing in common. Nietzsche, an unconfessed but furious solipsist, did not even keep a diary. The tremulous Marcel Proust and the

bleating Henri-Frédéric Amiel, heavyweights (and tedious heroes) of introversion, knew nothing of solipsism, they had no idea what “wanting to have the world to oneself alone” means.

My self-analysis would best take off from a specific datum, my social weightlessness. That’s how I would define it. A total absence of interpersonal ties. For example, I am no longer the passive subject, the receptor, of that (apparently) essential item, the “news.” No newspapers, no radio, no conversation. Nothing. An abysmal privation. Or a privilege. As I prefer.

But what a *jackpot*, for psychology, sociology, sociopsychology, this extreme case of mine. The experts would have unearthed:

Psychic disorders, breakdowns, dysfunctions
Instability, regression
Atrophy, excesses
Degeneration, prostration
Slump, collapse
Rambling, disorientation, disconnection
Clouded, absent responses
Seizures (neurotic)
Defoliation (emotional)

not to speak of the anxiety department (or if you will, tension and stress) with its vast typology and complex semiotics.

As the foregoing Rabelaisian abundance of terminology confirms, psychology or psychodiagnostics (and associated disciplines) is (was) not just a hard-working clinical-cultural industry. Beyond that or above all, it was a dense linguistic-literary agglutination, a great edifice of tropes and metaphors (not at all cheerful), and in that sense one of the legitimate heirs of rhetoric.

As for the “extreme case” of myself, I observe it, not very diligently or enthusiastically, in two restricted compartments: ideation and behavior. (Incidentally, as far as the purely vegetative side goes, there’s nothing to report; my health hasn’t deteriorated, on the contrary.)

Ideation: I’m amazed to note that I make no predictions, but live hour by hour. And given that any predictions I made could only be highly fanciful, I conclude that my imagination, never a high flier, has further withered. The absolutely exceptional nature of the Event is no incentive, as it would be for anyone less bankrupt than I.

Behavior: as the solitary do—or more precisely, the marooned, the castaways—I neglect my personal grooming. Soap use is at a minimum. Nails long and dirty. Augmented sweet tooth for chocolate, pastries, ice cream, biscotti, cakes, candied fruit, nougat, bonbons, etc. Diminished sexual desire, certainly due to a want of the physical stimulant, the woman. Unlike other singular (marooned) subjects I don’t think aloud.

One reaction that surprises me: a new mode of thinking about *them*, together, as a collectivity. An unexpected disposition to understand and feel for them. Sympathy, empathy. A shipwrecked human solidarity bobs up, a surprise last-ditch response.

I have decided to raise a cenotaph in their memory, in the Widmad market square. A cenotaph, I believe that’s what it’s called. I’ve been working on it for a couple of days; a tradesman’s van and a Mercedes coupe form the base of the monument; some twenty television sets removed from the Grand Emporium make up the body. On top of the TVs, some cameras and film cameras, crates of Coca-Cola bottles. At the top, about three meters from the ground, a huge poster taken from a travel agent’s window. A three-by-two-meter Kodachrome poster of a beach furnished with the celebrated white sand of the Bahamas, and the invitation: “Come to us, where life is better.” A bit like the refrain of that Tahitian song, “Native Gods are calling. To them we belong.”*

The sparse raindrops falling on the Widmad market do not dull the brilliant blue tropical sky, the green sea, white sand. The idea and the execution please me. No sarcasm intended: although *they* adored those things, they have valiantly given them up. And it’s not certain they were forced to. Do we know they’re unhappy to live in a world without soft drinks, automobiles, without “the box” to watch? My monument records their lifestyle, without irony. It’s a fitting homage, just slightly rhetorical.

There’s only one man who didn’t inspire that monument and to whom it’s not dedicated. My young Jewish doctor. Paradoxically the sole person whose death I know to be certain—historically, in the public records—is the only one who doesn’t seem dead to me. He’s living, or re-living. Although I should say—if it didn’t sound pathetic—that he’s come back to life *in me*. A sort of posthumous *engouement*, an infatuation. Or else, to the greater glory of psychoanalysis, the classic transference has taken place. In

Karpinsky, I believe, the medical mind-set was reduced in favor of an incisive, well-defined personality, within the bounds of his modesty. This was one of the rare encounters in my life, perhaps the only one, worth abandoning worldly standards for. Certainly, he treated my condition with discreet and subtle intuition. But the relation he established with me was outside the professional sphere. The way he'd fix his gentle, vigilant eyes on my face. Positive, generously so, even when the words were more negative. Once I asked him whether for someone like myself, remaining unmarried was a vow (a choice), or an obligation? "Neither one nor the other," he said. "You're joking, doctor." "Oh, no," he replied. And shook his head: no, no.

In a drawer in my chalet, I find a notebook I started a week or so ago, with a title at the top: "Me, and a bizarre circumstance."

The bizarre circumstance, obviously, was my situation after June 2. I did well not to continue beyond that title. Not because "writing inevitably falsifies" as I myself was known to remark when I was younger. But because I'd have written without having anything to write.

Anything, whether good or bad, is acceptable if it makes sense. If it's rational, one would have said in 1830; if it belongs to a *system of values*, in 1930. It's true even today. What's happening to me now would make some sense to a moral person. Perhaps to a religious man, with Providence to rely on. Would it make sense to a believer in an ideology? Sure, he'd dredge up something. Socio-political ideology, like the smell of cabbage soup, can get in anywhere.

But I'm in the dark. I can't see what's happening, and what to attribute it to (what's the purpose?). I can't situate it, I can't find a place for it. I must endure it.

I endure it: what's happening happens to *me*, I'm an essential part of this. Even if I were just a pure spectator, I could say that what's happening happens for me. The performance is for my benefit alone, a sort of *itinerarium mentis in Mortem*,* an anticipation, a "first principles" of death for my edification. Except that the beneficiary cannot benefit, because he finds no sense in it. Pointless to dedicate notebooks. Someone (was it the Italian, Pasolini?) said of one of his works: Its purpose is to have no meaning, not even a formal one. I could say the same of my situation. I must convince myself that facts, when they go so far as to be inexplicable, may go so far as to have no meaning, not even the most esoteric.

As for my *behavior*, the notebook points to my need for remastication, for the intellectual précis. It's a symptom of adaption, acceptance. Fear is a dictator: it takes power, then tries to get us to condone the putsch by installing *die Normalisierung*. The illusion that everything is normal again.

Another reaction is quite odd, though: I feel no need to hear their voices again. I own a historical souvenir, a recording of De Gaulle giving a speech ("*Aidez-moi! . . .*").* A fossilized individual, an unpleasant voice, but still a human voice. I'm not attracted. I wouldn't find Henriette's acidulous falsetto attractive either, if I'd recorded it, or Frederica's mellow, slightly virile contralto, heard muttering verses from the Lutheran prayer book as she tidied up the house. I have a recording of Alban Berg, which I listened to again. The violin concerto, a musical structure held together by a series of perfect alternating fifths. What's special is that Berg here made his peace with the ancien régime, something that doesn't displease a conservative like myself. Three notes in succession make a major triad, three more, a minor triad, and a breach is opened back to the tonal scale. The last four notes belong to the tonal scale, and in his final movement Berg stresses those notes to introduce the chorale "*Es ist genug*" ("It is enough"), its original harmonies almost intact, from the sorrowful Bach cantata *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort*.

"O Eternity, Word of Thunder." With some apprehension, I wondered if that bizarre circumstance I mentioned in my notebook was not some occult relative of the caprices of Bach-Berg.

Notebook aside, I continue pondering, observing, grasping at ideas and impressions. For whom? Karpinsky?

No, I don't think so. I believe that if I ponder, observe, etc., I do it, and am very happy to do it, for myself alone. I am the intended recipient, not the go-between, the emissary.

Here's another precept proven wrong: We think only as a function of others. Good old Durkheim, one of the theoretical fathers of "extreme sociology" went so far as to say that an idea represents the individual submitting to the social—which is more or less as if someone proclaimed that wild strawberries had been nationalized.

Wrong. I may no longer have ideas or views for the simple reason that "the others" aren't there to enjoy them?

I am, therefore I think. The electronic computers continue to function, or anyway could function, whether or not the operators and the users still exist; indeed they are so untouched that should I wish, I could talk to them, if that in turn didn't sound like a theory (cybernetic) to me. Or science fiction. Their memory is still capable of recording data, analyzing it, processing it. I may be immodest but I don't see

why, even in the absence of operators and users, I shouldn't be capable of doing the same.

At levels above my own, thought has almost always been a solitary process, asocial, its own end. Monads hidden away without windows, or who didn't present themselves at windows. The idolatry of communication is a recent vice.

And society, after all, simply a bad habit.

NEWS FROM Arcadia. I've been chasing one of the goats kept by my shepherds over the wet pastures and through the woods, and finally I catch her, mostly by chance. I drag her (literally) back home, tether her in the empty barn fending off her head butts, not all of them. I milk her to exhaustion, mine and hers. The milk—dense, salty, rich, with a flavor of the wild—is the milk of the origins, as young and ancient as a legend handed down, and delicious. I also had an unpleasant surprise, up at the cabin on the plain of Monte Castello, at about 1,800 meters. The big enameled crest of the city of Chrysopolis suddenly loomed out of the fog before me, a large plaque that the members of a Choral Society had tacked up at the entrance to the cabin when they chose this as their summer base. No one had informed me, and I was upset about it; it was an affront. Other intrusions in my kingdom? To be honest, the intrusion didn't bother me much, what offended me was where the intruders came from.

The truth is, I just can't bear our little metropolis. The name alone, even just the emblem, irks me.

It's been a while since I stopped trying to understand why, reluctant as I am to probe even the slightest bit under the surface. At best, I proceed by exclusion. A thing is *not this* or *not that*. For example, mine is not a furious rejection, based on deeply pondered socio-political impulses. I have no political impulses. (A critic could peg me with just three coordinates: intellectual tendency to isolationism, vague anarchism, petty bourgeois conservatism—that petty bourgeois animus that Lenin identified as the number one enemy.) Chrysopolis is one of the main engines of the monopoly, one of the nerve centers of the system (capitalist), and perhaps its most powerful "stomach." But these are not the reasons I dislike it. Nor is the problem ambivalence, love-hate, rancor toward the city because some of us hoped to gain (and were denied) gratifications, outlets, success from it. It's something else. An organic incompatibility, a mountaineer's genes, underlying moralistic objections? I don't know, and I don't want to know. It's just something I must accept, live and let live. I do know I threw stones at the Chrysopolis shield. I have good aim and at twenty meters I battered away at it until it was no longer recognizable. And enjoyed myself like a child.

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Mylius (former paranoid) had a bleak and irrefutable hypothesis, funereally reassuring.

Human beings were half-dead even while they were alive, he held. My talk with Mylius comes back to me only now, dug up by my discussion with myself on the presentiment, the *itinerarium mentis*.

It was an April morning. We were having coffee on the terrace at the Hôtel Zemmi; the view was festive (snow and sun), and we were feasting our eyes on a Sachertorte layered with whipped cream. Why the old man chose that moment to expound his philosophy, I have no idea. A portent?

Mylius: Let us begin with a realistic notion of what "being dead" means to us. Impassive so far as the outside world goes, insensible, indifferent. If we agree that this is death, then life is similar, the difference between the two merely quantitative. Ideally, life ought to be learning, experience, interests, but you know very well that measured against that ideal of life (in any case never fully realized), measured against a theoretically possible multiplicity of experiences or relations, each of us is not much more than a dead man. Death signifies impassibility, yet ignorance and forgetfulness or the tendency to forget, reduce the living—in terms of nearly all the possible experiences and relations—to a similar impassibility. We are dead to everything that doesn't touch us or doesn't interest us. I don't mean what's happening on the Moon, but what's happening in the house just across the road. Of the myriad events taking place every day in our own human sphere, we know of only a few, a few dozen, shall we say, and most of them indirectly, via the news. We speak, badly, one language of the 3,000 spoken on Earth. Biological death, then, is the perfecting of a state we already occupy.

Me: My biological death makes me impassible to myself, the private individual, but while I live whatever affects me, the private individual, is something I suffer or enjoy. Greatly!

Mylius: There's no reason the private individual should be the privileged object of experience. Everything that is real can be experienced, but we're incapable of achieving that, and if as seems right, that is how life should be measured, we don't have very much of it. It's understandable that we console ourselves with the thought that *not very much*, however little, is precious and important to us, but it doesn't make things better.

Me: Perhaps. But that "not very much" will suffice for me.

Mylius: Consider the blindness of a dead man and that of a living person. What is the difference? Our ignorance, and thus indifference, impassibility, confronted with almost all the possible "data" or even

with the sum of others' experiences, those of our own kind—that ignorance amounts to a genuine blindfold. That data, those experiences *don't exist* for us, and we don't for them. No matter that for other individuals, they are the very plot of daily life; we, here, are dead, and it's pointless to call that death metaphorical. It's a partial death, but real.

Me: Life is motion; death, torpor.

Mylius: There's no denying the distinction between the two states. Certainly, life is movement. But it is a circular motion (around that tiny nucleus called the self), motion so circumscribed that it's like a *piétiner sur place*: a tapping of your heels in place while surrounded by a large circle of shade* of all that escapes our cognition, and of which we desire no cognition. And I'm not referring to the *knowable*, and even less to *the mystery of the universe*, I'm referring to petty reality, and as I said, that closest to us.

We may talk of the individual's life dynamism, of his nearly infinite multiplicity of relationships, or experiences. But we must face the fact that this is rhetoric. Each of us is limited to his own tiny fragment of reality, and in fact, cannot escape it. The contrasting rhetoric, about incommunicability, is true only in this sense. Acting, learning, observing: these functions lead us around in circles. And, please note, we are individuals, coherent, stable (even physically), thanks to this. Surrounded by the *possible*, which almost never materializes, but closed to and distant from that immensity—lucky for us or we would fritter ourselves away. Determination is negation; as individuals we must have these strict confines, we must exclude, close off. And thus life, anyway our life, is awfully similar to what we call its opposite.

Me: Not a happy tale.

Mylius: Not happy? Actually it's comforting, considering that we all have to die. You, too, even though you are still young. Or do you think you'll be an exception?

Me: Certainly not. (As you can see I was anything but prescient just then.)

Mylius: Think about ataraxia, or utter equanimity, the supreme form of spiritual life for the Stoics, the Buddhists, the ascetic Christians. Such detachment before moral and physical ills is a taste of the dead man's impassability. In any case, secular man strives to be imperturbable, impassive, before death; it's the extreme toward which the hero, the man gifted with courage, the real man, aims. It's spelled out explicitly in the famous expression *perinde ac cadaver*, in the manner of a corpse. You know the one about the soldier, observing his dead companion out in front of the trench, who says: "Look at that, he's the bravest, lying there under the machine-gun fire calmly looking up at the heavens." There's nothing offensive about that remark, it's profound.

Thus Mylius, the philosopher, that April morning. All the better for him, actually; if he believed what he was saying, the Event will not have been a surprise, or painful for him. Radical pessimism turns out to be much like optimism.

Let me add that our philosopher was nearly sixty years old and hobbled by arthritis, that a few years back his wife had abandoned him and run off with an assistant, also a philosopher. Even so, philosophy had this going for it, it was anti-rhetorical. It debunked a pseudo-fatal antithesis probably unknown in nature. To some extent, that's a consolation.

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Widmad, eight AM. I'm admiring the monument I built. It hasn't moved, it has stood up to the elements (sleet and wind this morning), but now a question occurs to me. The Kodachrome landscape, sun beating down on the Bahamas, the white sand, the "Come to us, where life is better": what if the great exodus was only a flight to the Bahamas? Or some other unexplored earthly paradise?

They used to say that the dying embark on "a better life." The poster, in fact, urged us to go "where life is better." The death-prize, like collective tourist emigration, makes sense in a century like our own hugely dedicated to the improving activity of travel.

Tourism is a surrogate for total military mobilization, said Hans Magnus Enzensberger.*

There is, however, a logistical problem. Pure spirits, too, appreciate decent meals and lodging. Neither the Bahamas nor all the Antilles put together could host such a vast congregation. Even paradise has to offer some comforts.

I come back to my first hypothesis. Volatilization—sublimation. Sublimation—assumption (to the heavens).

Now let's see. I once read something, a text by Iamblichus* that I looked up for some reason, I no longer recall why. It dealt with the demise of the species and it was titled *Dissipatio Humani Generis*. Dissipation not in the moral sense. The version I remember was in Latin, and it seems that in the third- and fourth-century Latin *dissipatio* meant evaporation, or nebulization, or some physical process like that, and Iamblichus referred to a fatal phenomenon of this kind. He was less catastrophic than other

prophets: there was no great flood, no holocaust *solvens saeculum in favilla*,* covering the world in ashes, like a nuclear catastrophe of today. Rather, he wrote of human beings changed by sudden miracle into a spray, or an imperceptible (harmless and probably odorless) gas without any intermediate combustion. Maybe not glorious, but at least dignified.

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I've had some erudite pursuits in the past, and though I've abstained for years, I don't regret them.

Before Ezekiel (ten centuries after Moses) there was no mention in Judaism of a celestial life set aside for humans after their stay on earth. The just were rewarded with prosperity (earthly) and longevity; it's said of Abraham that he died "sated with years." Later celestial compensation would become, as we know, one of the fundamental ingredients in the religious recipe for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and a favorite argument for theology and related literature. Among the innumerable commentators was one Salvian of Trier, alive in the third or the fourth century, a Christian writer, not well known, a hagiographer and apologist. In a letter to the bishop of his city titled *De Fine Temporum* (I think, but have no way to verify it), Salvian, seized with evangelical mercy for the woes of men, spoke of their hoped-for mass *sublimatio*.

And this is nice: he granted that final redemption even to pagans. All living bodies having been made ethereal in a single miraculous event, they would be taken to heaven in a mass assumption. Abrupt and unexpected. I quote from memory: *Mundus permanebit*. (He was right on that point). *Viri, mulieres, pueri, humani viventes cuius-cumque aetatis, ordinis vel nationis, raptim sublimabuntur*. * (It wasn't Salvian who inspired Freud; Freud's sublimation is a pale metaphor.)

But Salvian joined clemency with discerning justice. *Nihil huius gloriae decet peccatorem*. * Pagans as such can sublimate, sinners, no. It would be interesting to see which of the two categories I belong to, assuming they are not superimposed. But my knowledge, or self-knowledge, does not reach that far. I desist.

WHEN I went into the shepherds' house the other day, I saw no nightclothes on the bed, as I recall. Now I look into one of the rooms that was occupied at the Mayr, and overcoming a certain revulsion, poke around the sheets using a clothes hanger.

No nightgowns or pajamas. In the closet I find an entire female wardrobe: evening dress, tennis clothes, ski gear, and a jewelry case with bracelets and rings. On the table are binoculars and a Polaroid camera. Below, parked in the piazza, the woman's car. But the nightclothes have disappeared. The *Dissipatio Humani Generis*, the *sublimatio*, has made a subtle distinction: the vanities, even precious, adherent things (jewelry) remain below, destined to damage and loss, the clothing that in that moment covers people, shares the fate of the bodies. Nylon, rayon, polyamide, and other fibers invade the *intermundia*.

I am wrong to be astonished. Augustine of Hippo supplied the theological explanation. It is unseemly, the great Augustine said somewhere, that human beings should appear naked in the kingdom of heaven. A more than welcome observation (demonstrating that a major thinker can also pay attention to the details of his science, something I don't see Husserl doing in our times). Clothing, suggested Augustine, is *natural hominis tegumentum, quasi altera cutis*. * Perfect.

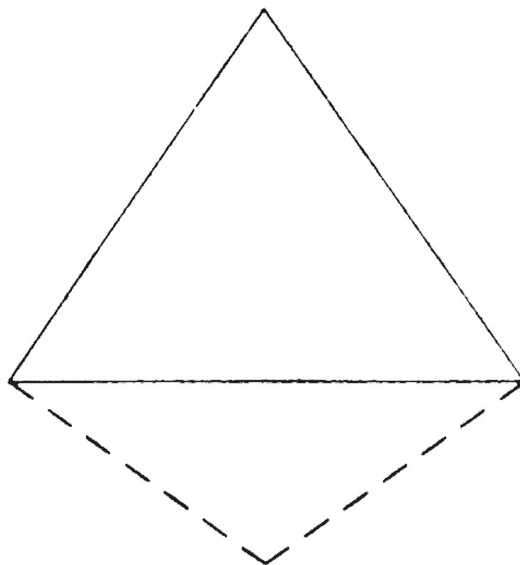
In the room I visited at the Mayr there was the usual supply of tranquilizers on the night table. I pocketed them. Not because I suffer from insomnia; I had another idea. I feel I have a duty to symbolically resow (yes, resow) the species, following Deucalion.* He used stones that grew into human beings. With those meprobamate pills, I hope to propagate a calmer, less quarrelsome breed (compared to the extinct). I thought I might plant them on the Bellevue tennis courts where I watched the Davis Cup's European zone matches. They ought to produce handsome people, like tennis champions, and like them, inclined toward fair play. I'll spread them parsimoniously. It's a breed that tends to multiply exponentially. You never know.

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So Deucalion appears.

Nothing illegitimate about that. I am the Successor. Humanity *was*, now I am. Incarnation of the epilogue. Outcome of the generations. The purpose, the destination, the journey's end. (Is there a humorous aspect to what I'm saying? Up to a point. The humor's fitting, if not altogether sincere; it's undercut by pride and melancholy).

I see a pyramid. If I look at it carefully, a temporally existing, upside-down pyramid. Actually, two pyramids. The one, upright, widens over the eons from the first man or hominid progenitor to the swarming billions of creatures of the same species present on the night of June 2. Underneath that, the upside-down triangle (and this one has no temporal existence, it is merely an ideal) that from the swarming billions suddenly shrinks to a single individual.



I am that point of termination. (The word vertigo derives from *vertex*, summit or apex: *mal di vertex*. My head spins; it must.)

If up until now there has been humanity, and now there is only me, then I must take on the activities that *they* have had to abandon. And what did *they* do, in fact? What did they do? Well, it's pretty simple: they acted so as to achieve things. And they thought about things they saw around them, or believed they saw around them. And they represented them with words, signs, sounds.

Other than that, they did nothing. I may be a reductionist (a simplifier), but I don't think I've omitted anything. To carry on, to substitute for them, is not something that reduces me to quivering with fear; it wouldn't make anyone quiver. When all is said and done they didn't have great expectations, or ambitions.

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The one thing that's certain is that I'm the survivor. By chance?

I don't think so. I've always believed that Chance—supposing such a capital-C thing exists and isn't just that holy foolishness we call *asylum ignorantiae**—is utterly undistinguishable from a superior and inscrutable will. Lloyds and the great London insurance companies didn't consider hurricanes and freak waves, great wildfires and earthquakes to be accidents, they called them Acts of God.

I survive. Therefore I was chosen, or excluded. It was not chance, but will. But it is up to me to interpret. I'll conclude I'm the *chosen* if I decide that humanity deserved to come to an end on the night of June 2, and the *dissipatio* was punishment. And that I'm the *excluded* if I decide that it's all a glorious mystery, an assumption to the empyrean, the angelification of the species, and so forth.

They are absolute alternatives, but I've been given the faculty to choose. I am the elect—or the damned. With the curious distinction that it's up to me to elect or damn myself. And I do have to decide. "To drown in the abyss—heaven or hell, who cares?"* That's all very well for Baudelaire the magician. For me, no. That's mumbo jumbo. It matters. It matters.

The magician here supersedes all oratory, all prayer. Or better, in the present circumstances, it is St. Thomas Aquinas with his sober, fierce Latin. *Beati in regno coelesti videbunt poenas damnatorum, quia beatitudo per hoc magis complacebit.** The blessed in the kingdom of heaven will see the punishments of the damned so that their bliss might be more pleasing to them. Supposing I am damned, my good friend Mylius (who won't forgive me two things, Henriette's visits and my thirty-nine years, for he was fifty-nine) when he looks out from his heaven will be pleased to see me in hell. I don't doubt he will feel repaid. And how will Professor Mylius fare in the kingdom of heaven, with his bliss? Will it be like those sabbaticals at Princeton that he so envied his more illustrious colleagues?

Meanwhile I, too, have compensations, although I am excluded. Silence is not one of my punishments; from dusk to dawn, noisy dormice gnaw busily on the roof beams. They gnaw all night, and in the morning I find sawdust on the ground below. This is no mere mania to destroy; it has been said they sharpen their teeth this way, to better unshell wild nuts and berries in the woods. The marmots, when they dig their burrows, lining them with leaves and stocking them with small dead animals for the winter, make a cry like the whimper of their little ones. When the courting season is over, the long-eared owl grows reticent and is heard only at great intervals, while the little owl keeps sounding his musical calls, and the closer he is to his nest, the more he sings. The afternoons are loud with cuckoos; the evenings ring with the woodpecker and his strange call, like the hinges creaking on an old iron-bound castle door. I call him the Gothic bird.

There's my thundering creek, and because of the abundant rain, countless runnels flashing down the mountain, silver threads harmonious and strong despite the wind that ruffles them. When the wind rises, it carries their voices right into the house.

Nature seems unaware of the night of June 2. Maybe she is gladdened to have all of life to herself again, now that the brief *intermezzo* known to us as history is closed. She has no regrets or misgivings, I am sure.

TODAY I share nature's indifference, or should I say abhorrence. So much so that I ask myself if this *intermezzo* is really over, or won't simply start up again in a moment, a naughty prankster. Given that *they* were neither necessary, nor helpful.

I consult my personal mass spectrometer. I find no results on black (hatred), but on gray (fear), yes, often; and on the ashy yellow of annoyance, the data is strong. The sample ranges from the ascetic vampirism of "early detectors" to the injurious pettiness of acquaintances, the inevitable frictions of daily life. The colleague who came to visit and asked "why in heaven's name" had I chosen to live in this "goatherd's hut"? The book contract with swindler clauses, like the one stipulating that "The Publisher assumes no obligation as to when the Work may appear in print . . ."

I'm no longer the pious Antigone contemplating funeral monuments. I've moved into the phase of psychic disconnection, of coming unglued. Incoherence. Fluctuating states of mind in a rarefied atmosphere. Today I'm assailed by small animosities, marginal episodes that date back to "my old age" and are generally quite overlookable. This one, among the many, comes to mind, I don't know why.

The editor used to allot each of us new staff members one column in the paper in turn. The piece I managed to push through once was somewhat pompously titled "Against formalism and conformism: examining some stereotypes" and was meant to be the first of a series. It was dedicated to two terms, alienation and prostitution, circumscribing the first and amplifying the second. I proposed that "alienation" be limited to what the later Marx intended. A worker who is in a position to manage his own employment, if he so desires, and thus be an inventive electrician or a creative blacksmith, yet who prefers the assembly line for the guaranteed paycheck, has no right to consider himself a victim of alienation. As for professional prostitution, it would rightly include those women who legally prostitute themselves with a husband they don't love, or don't love anymore, but who continue to accept the ease and creature comforts with which he pays them. The bourgeois ladies were virtuous, the unions philistine, I was told contemptuously. The editor threatened to fire me, I had attacked "the circulation."

An extreme left group had joined the Zero Population Growth movement for birth control (unusual, the left being optimistic, agnostic about sex, and anti-Malthusian); they asked me to speak on the radio and I was happy to do so. Mine was a brief sermon, eight minutes. The following day the program management distanced themselves from my views but I continued to get anonymous phone calls at home for quite a while, invariably along the lines of "You filthy, depraved unmarried bastard." My reply: "I can still change that. I haven't even turned twenty-four." Or else I would put a record on and play into the receiver a silly French song that was popular at the time, "*Les célibataires sont si malheureux*"*: "Bachelors are unhappy men / We'd better say a prayer for them / Because they're always on their own, / And lay themselves to bed alone."

I never had much luck in my few radio appearances. Recently, after I'd given up political journalism, I sat at a so-called round table where I was able to pose the following question: If the press aspires to represent public opinion, as it claims to, why is it still monopolized by the journalist tribe, not more than 150 people in this whole country, editors in chief and managing editors? Open up to the public! Professional journalists could be responsible for reporting the news and offering comments, and those two tasks would be plenty to justify their existence. The rest, the bulk of the paper, would collaborate with the users, the readers, a joint participation that would certainly be unregulated, discordant, and partial, but still the only way to give voice to an authentic public opinion. One of my colleagues said, very politely, that I didn't seem to have the slightest idea of what it meant to put out a newspaper. Others stood up to the microphone to declare I was out of my mind.

Remains of petty resentments. Small stuff. I had conveniently forgotten about them. Why they bob up again now I have no idea.

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The directors, the editors, the writers, colleagues, ex-colleagues, and "friends" are now *on the other side*. Walking the bare hills of Mount Armageddon. Waiting for the final judgment, wary, they dig into the ash with their fingernails, covering the telex and the typewriters to which they're (rightly) chained. Angels on guard watch that they don't escape. They are three black angels, the same before whom idolaters prostrated themselves when they were alive. Each bears a shield: on one shield is written "sociologism," on another "historicism," on the third "psychologism." At the foot of the hill, two snakes creep by,

hissing and spitting fire. One has scales that spell out “advertising,” and the other, “marketing.”

I admit, it’s not very original as an apocalyptic vision.

It’s pretty implausible; I need more details. The waiting throngs giggle and exchange notes. *Dies illa? Non creditur. Le jugement dernier? Incroyable. Das jüngste Gericht? Unmöglich. Doomsday? You’re kidding!*

Ideas contain the solvent that activates them when they come alive and blocks them when they don’t. Without that productive solvent, they are flimsy, nebulous, but thanks to that nebulosity, whatever catastrophe comes, they can resist.

Resist and reemerge. Ideas are like a phoenix (a noisy, featherless phoenix, a caged bird). For the phoenix, there is no end of the world, or the end of the world is just an opportunity to rise up and take charge. There is nothing to hope for or to fear.

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Robinson Crusoe kept track of time by carving notches on a post, something that would never have entered the head of that other well-known sailor and castaway, Ulysses. Crusoe, the modern man, was suspended between two disbeliefs; he no longer trusted the natural knowledge that correctly registers the passing of the days and nights, and he also had little faith (rightly so) in *ich-Zeit*, his “own” time. Those forms of disbelief have grown sharper and more complicated for us. Our *bête noire* is *naïve realism*, and it’s as naïve to think that time and space are objective realities as it is to think that a child loves his mother when he actually lusts for her. We no longer register nature’s time, while the time we “possess” gets confused with that pap of sensations and impressions, that subjectivity we’ve made of the external world, distorting its qualities and its measure.

I should have marked the days on a calendar, after June 2. But I had no calendar, nor watch that reports the date. *Before*, I relied on the newspapers to keep track of the days. I shunned those artificial counters that provide yet another sort of time: one that standardizes and abolishes the pauses, even as the devices that surround us multiply to infinity. Our haste is pathological, an anxiety to consume life.

Today a problem presented itself: to recover, out of this confusion of times, a credible temporal dimension. Recover it or confirm it; in truth I wasn’t completely oblivious and an instinct told me that two whole weeks, at the least, have gone by since the Event. Well, the problem was resolved in the simplest way, by means of chrono-cheese.

There’s a certain type of white, buttery imported cheese (a bit like Neufchâtel) that I like a lot when it’s fresh, and often eat. I was at the Mayr to do my “shopping,” that is, to replenish supplies. As I passed by the dumbwaiter in the kitchen, I caught a whiff of a sharp, disagreeable odor. When I opened the door I found a large tray of cheeses, among them that imported one I like. Covered by a layer of mold. Long, thick greenish filaments, real vegetation. I plunge my finger in and find the mold is a couple of centimeters deep. As I’m something of an expert on cheeses, I conclude that a layer of mold like that needed fifteen days at least to form. This is no laughing matter. Chrono-cheese is no less empirical than carbon-dating. And no more a matter of opinion.

I believe my estimate of the time that has passed is pretty accurate. It’s important because the probability that the Event is reversible diminishes with the days that go by. The “dear ones who’ve vanished” become each day, with more certainty, the “dear departed.”

The social machinery was able to grind tirelessly, indefinitely, so long as it never stopped even for an instant. Uninterrupted continuity—or immediate decomposition. According to that logic, it’s unlikely it can now resume work. But I wonder, can I depend on that?

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The Mayr’s kitchen and nearby rooms have more surprises in store.

At Widmad, as at Lewrosen, I feed the dogs, which are locked inside the gates of the gardens and starving. From the mansard window of an attic room at the Mayr comes a whimpering lament. I go up to the room and find a large dog prisoner there, no signs of rabies, no fear of water. The animal had drunk a little from the sink and was hungry; the packet of biscuits found in a drawer that had kept it alive had been devoured right down to the paper wrapping. I opened the door but the dog didn’t move. Its owner hadn’t gone out, and the dog figured he was still there and refused to leave him.

From some of the clothing hanging on the coat rack, the owner appeared to have been a cook at the hotel. On the night of the Event, he had been sitting at a desk, writing. A foreigner, he was writing in his own language, which I’m pretty familiar with. It was a page from a diary, or a testament of some kind, and I copied it out because it was worth keeping:

Saturday, June 1, 11:50 PM

For the last time I think of my wife, and I beg her to forgive my wrongs just as I forgive hers and put them aside. I would try to warn her if I had any time left. (But in any case, she wouldn't believe me.) The supreme moment has come for her, for me, for all men, and we shall not see the sun rise tomorrow. My impressions, therefore, were not mistaken. Through the open window I can see the sky, mortal and black, and a wind as hot as human breath brushes me, a wind that never blew on this earth before.

On the night of June 2, there was indeed a hot wind from the north but it was merely the one we call the foehn. The cook, who didn't know these mountains, must have thought it strange.

Humanity is not responsible, not guilty: we submit to our fate. We love death. The death of others, and what's more, in these precipitous times and without knowing it, our own. But this is no suicidal rapture, nor the death instinct posited by psychology. In reality, man is passive. It is death that acts, summoning man. Death's roll call cannot go unanswered. Pleased that we consent, silently but unanimously, It will come to take us tonight, sparing us the agony and the anguish of dying. This final chapter, for many or for all of us, will resolve insoluble problems, it will be the unexpected remedy for unbearable ills. How strange that in other times the millennium, the end of days, was considered a cruel punishment, when in fact it is so fair and good. As for myself, will it come prematurely in my twenty-seventh year? No. I am with them and one of them. First, an involuntary instrument, now I offer myself as an object of death.

I translate this in my own words, but the substance of the message (Hölderlinesque, I should say) is clear. "An instrument of death," this good fellow who crowned the Saint-Honorés with whipped cream and custard? A doleful prophet at his solitary desk as the end came near. I imagine him as a dilettante exegete, interpreting Nostradamus. A Millenarian, or a Jehovah's Witness.

What strikes me is his social status. He was far from belonging to the intelligentsia. This final page of his, although it borrows from common prophecies and judgments, rings true.

And I, seeking "guarantees" receive an astonishing, reassuring one from him.

YOUR TEMPERAMENT is repetitive, Karpinsky told me.

Repetition, in the sense that psychiatrists use the word, is a quality that may have helped me to adapt. But I'd give the credit above all to my nominalism. I've always been a nominalist; society doesn't exist, what exist are groups, or rather the individual, to put it simply.

The only reality that a man must take into account is the one he creates as an individual.* The statement isn't mine, it is Charles Reich's, but there's truth to it.

The night of June 2 brought thinking life to an end, and thus History. Maybe. In the meantime, the rain has also come to an end, and I take advantage of the pause to climb the road and then the track that leads up to the Malga Ross, and this problem of the end of History grows less worrisome. The *res gestae*, the deeds accomplished, don't necessarily imply a plurality of *gerentes*, of actors; history could carry on with just one person, for one person. In Widmad this morning I smashed the window of a shop to take two grapefruits. So as a historian, let me record that anarchy has prevailed with the defeat of its primal enemy, private property. At the same time a monarchy has been installed, in the most elementary meaning of the term: all power to one man. Anarchy and monarchy coexist, now and in me. No one possesses me; I possess all. In theory I could take the Codex Atlanticus or the Gutenberg Bible and carry it home, and no one would report me; I could call myself a philosopher and no one would contest it; I could proclaim perpetual peace on earth and be sure it wouldn't be breached. In theory . . .

The mule track that leads up the bottom slopes of Mountàsc is wide and comfortable; it's paved with stone slabs that rise in steps, neatly squared off. Worthy of the name it bears, or did once, the Via Romana. A sort of mountain Via Appia climbing past sober stands of larch, trees even plainer than the Mediterranean cypresses of the Appian Way. Across the valley, no more than 300 meters away as the crow flies, I can see the mouth of the cave of the siphon. Cave of the futile invitation. I think of the testament I found in that attic apartment, the words mixing ingenuous rhetoric and genuine desperation: *Death's roll call cannot go unanswered*. But I, for one, did not respond. I was resistant to the call, evidently. Courageous or coward, I survived.

Maybe it was neither courage nor cowardice, but a kind of armored mediocrity that provided me a pardon just for that reason. An insignificant individual was chosen to embody continuity, a mysterious choice that may contain some wisdom. The mule track comes to an end where the larch trees end, and the path narrows so much that a single person can barely pass. How did the Ross family get their enormous Fleckvieh cows up here? Then again, maybe the melancholy cook from the Mayr wasn't wrong in his farewell message, apart from his romantic conception of death. If it's hard to believe that death could take the voice of a siren to seduce men, it's certainly true that men, whether they knew it or not, wanted to die. For years, for decades. Pollution: the polluters sullied themselves first and foremost: "I live in my factory yard, even though I have a house in town," says one company owner. It was violence, first and foremost against themselves. A young man charged with armed robbery is asked whether it was necessary to shoot at the cashier. He replies, "I don't know why I shot the cashier, I wanted to shoot myself."

But in their explicit self-awareness, the melancholy cook, the armed robber, and the kamikaze factory owner weren't typical. On the larger scale the death race took place in silence, impelled by a pressing, unacknowledged need. And that silence, as well as the absence of obvious cultural or economic motives, meant that our poor, sad discipline of sociology ignored the matter, although there were some who kept their eye on it. The chief of the New Jersey state highway patrol, a perfectly ordinary official, told reporters: You speak of "carelessness" when you write about the Sunday slaughter on the highways, but carelessness is not the cause, just the means. Drivers are careless because they intend to die. Because they don't want to go home. Take away their cars and they will throw themselves from a window.

The path widens as it levels out, or rather, it disappears into the vast basin of the Ross pastures, clothed with heather, and junipers and clear brooks that run between boulders growing lichens, and some of those boulders are in themselves perfect small mountains. The glaciers of Mountàsc open like a fan, and I remember having seen them burst into flames at dawn, above the snowfields that still held the color of night. At the height of its triumphant evolution, the self searched out the most direct route to the non-self: not slow descent into entropy but swift and total self-destruction, and it didn't have to be painless. The *cupio dissolvi*, the "wish to dissolve." Freud called it the death drive, or instinct, and universalized it, assigning it to everyone. In his day, it was a wanton abstraction even to him. A harmless philosopheme, not even very original for that matter, to set against the dogma of omnipresent Eros for

the symmetry. Freud was quietly bourgeois: how dismayed he'd have been if he'd ever thought that human experience would confirm his death drive, and even surpass it.

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The glaciers of Mountàsc are becoming visible, although today it's easy to confuse them with the low, uniformly white sky, and because the Karessa glaciers on the other side can also be seen, they, too, confused with the clouds, I have the impression it is all just one mass, a curving vault, and there's no sky and I'm standing in the middle of an immense frozen cave. Two mountain ranges hold it up, for now. At any moment it could crack and collapse, or just slide slowly down onto these rocks, and me.

Note: human beings were not pursuing a collective catastrophe; they'd already carried out a first, limited trial of that at Hiroshima, and found it was within their means. They were seeking separate, individual deaths, and in this they stayed close to the traditions of conventional suicide: in the family car with wife and children; or at the bank where only a few clients and the tellers were witnesses; in a hijacked plane, with no more than seventy or eighty fellow passengers. The atomic holocaust, so much in keeping with ancient eschatology, was too spectacular, or too "social." Eschatology: who today, in this world of computers and supersonic planes, knows anything about that archaic and abstruse science? No, even if the *cupio dissolvi* collectively willed it, the actual dissolution had to take place *in private*, which is individualism's sacred altar. To each his own, wherever and however his particular fate or his customs and interests lead him. All to the same end, but not in a crowd. Sociologism, that collectivizing god, had to make peace with its opposite in extremis. Cows and goats, Giovanni would have said.

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And so it was, they got what they wanted.

This, then, is the famous Malga Ross. The Ross who gave this Alpine pasture its name were distant relatives of my family, and I used to come up here when I was just a boy. I come back experimentally now, in search of the *metus silvanus* (dread of the forest) and the ancient *pavor montium* (fear of the mountains) of fables. This isn't merely academic. The disappearance of the reverential fear that vast, uncontaminated nature once inspired in man is one of the vital impairments our age suffers from. Here there is no one between me and nature; the crags and the ice are sheer solitude and immensity, and I must salvage nature and taste it again. The Ross kept their herd in this high pasture most of the summer, and as a child I used to appear smeared and stained with the bilberries I'd picked along the path. And I'd help out with the animals; I'd try to milk the cows, and ride them, or maybe just chase them with a stick to frighten them, or so they'd frighten me. The fence and the cows are gone; the pasture is nothing but juniper and heather in flower, and the wild bees don't come. No grass to graze on, sparkling green beneath the snow in patches.

The place has grown more rugged; it's untouched, as it was in the beginning. Objectively, it has become markedly more beautiful. I, instead, am inert, lifeless. Uninvolved. I observe, without emotion. I suspect this has been pointless. (Why undertake a hike of two hours to see and hear, but not to feel?) The sky, so heavy and close, is a real threat. When at times the wind comes down, it really does carry the smell of the glacier (a vitreous odor, of caves and abysses), and in the intervals, the silence is utterly primeval. The cliff that plunges straight down a hundred paces away is desolate, merciless; it cuts off the world. And yet the *pavor montium* I feel is merely a sensation of cold, bodily cold. I wish I had boiling hot coffee and a wool sweater. To experience nature poetically, perhaps I had need of someone to contend it with, someone I must keep at a distance?

A disheartening thought: nature was beautiful and fearsome, but asocial. It presupposed (in a negative sense) man. I wanted a nature inviolate, but violable.

I wondered: to enjoy it, was it necessary to post No Trespassing signs?

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The sign, or better, the scroll. The words "They were as you and you will be as they are" painted over a grate on the side of St. Vilcifredo, under the portico. And a fleshy elderly woman dressed in a cheap pink wool dress, who calls to me: "What's this say? Mister, can you please translate?"

It happened in the early evening of Saturday, June 1. I had gone down to Widmad to see the village for the last time and equip myself with a pocket flashlight to light my way inside the cave of the siphon that night. I was starting out toward home, and the setting sun was sending out oblique, reddish rays that pierced the houses, the square, and the portico of the church, a rare, fatal sunset. I stood and explained

to the foreign lady. Around 1650 there had been an epidemic, and a few decades later the church had been built on the spot where a large common grave had been dug. Following Catholic custom, the skulls, hundreds of them, were walled up in a small space that was part of the church but opened out onto the street for the benefit of passersby. "The bones you see, held in by the grate, were once great minds. Remember the scene with Hamlet and the gravediggers?"

According to my plan, I then had seven or eight hours to live. As I excused myself and got away from the lady in pink, I thought it could not have been just a random coincidence. I didn't dwell on it, though. I believed I had more important things to think about at that moment.

This evening, passing by St. Vilefredo at the same hour, I catch sight of the grate again. What I can only consider a miracle, a dreadful miracle, has taken place.

THE THREE grated windows under the portico have lost their macabre commemorative significance. Now they suggest something else, something worse. They are empty.

And I am still alive. Eyes wide, nerves shattered, I stare at them. In a sort of horrid hypnosis. I, the witness.

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I manage to break away. At the corner of the street is a garden, where some branches have been severed by the wind beating against the gate. I'm not sure how, but I walk to the gate and pick up a branch, return to the grates, and push it through. As I poke around, disgust floods me. There's nothing left: death, dry and dusty, has departed. I enter the church and walk around behind the space where the skulls were. Walled up as before, intact.

My gestures appear logical. I act from an impulse that takes the place of reason, and of will. I don't think, and I don't speak to myself. I seek no connections or explanations. I'm aware I won't return home. I'm aware that I have (should have) a desperate longing to hear a (human) voice. Sure enough, I head toward the market square, and find myself, out of some dumb reflex, about to enter a phone booth. The rain coming down sideways on the piazza drives me toward the road to Lewrosen. I climb the stairs of the Hôtel Mayr. I won't be alone there, I imagine. I won't be alone?

I sense (and only sense), befuddled, that the night will be long, that I won't have the courage to go up to one of the rooms, that I'll be cold, terribly cold, in the vast, empty hall, beneath lights that will not give me reprieve. But I won't go home, for the love of God, no.

Hmm. "For the love of God." I ought to sink into solemn horror. Or at least quiver with superstitious awe.

I ought to say, "But therefore—" the theological and technical term that I know and that would justify the announcement about to be absurdly confirmed for me and only me, today, millennia later. For me, here and alive. But I will not say that word. I refuse. My fear cannot be described. It is too great.

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And too new. No one on earth, in a world convinced it had known every possible fear, knew this one.

I don't enter but remain standing, resting against the revolving door, my back to the mystery that I allow myself to think I've left behind. And wait.

Once again, I resurface from my trance to eat. I find something comestible in one of the ground-floor rooms. To drink, no; I do not drink. I curl up in a chair, covering myself with the long black jacket belonging to Battaglia the porter that was hanging there. I don't dare to turn off the lights in this corner where I find myself, and they beat down on me violently. Still, I fall into a heavy slumber and wake not long after from a nightmare: in an immense, blazing grotto I am lying flat under two keys crossed over my sternum, crushing it. They are nothing more than the gold keys pinned to the lapel of Battaglia's jacket, which I had noticed while covering myself. I cannot go back to sleep now. And the night is interminable.

It expands and continues into the day, which enters feebly and late through the glass panes of the door, beyond which a hard rain is falling. But my mental and muscular paresis is complete. I don't get up from my chair, my bodily functions slow to a halt, I don't even feel the need to eat, and I have no thoughts. Then night falls again, and somehow I'm able to recognize night because I had feared it and hoped it would not arrive. Sleep comes too, though wakefulness never lets go, sleep that is stupor and silence among objects both nearby and unreachable, known and unrecognizable, disfigured.

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For two nights and nearly two days, I lay in that chair, dead but not clinically, or in whatever state is closest to the absence of life. Nothing has remained in my memory, although the events are recent; I may have exhibited some motor reactions but they left no trace. Recovery began with the body; I urinated behind the chair, knowing I was doing so, while on the psychic side I said to myself, "Enough," and I knew I said it. I recalled the tragic Bach chorale.

It was worse. The trauma had reduced me to the (not entirely negative) state of a thing. Now I was

returning to awareness, and fear.

Fear that served as its own measure, that justified itself, fed on itself. Ruminant. Evil. Ready to see itself as perfect, pure and unprecedented. Here is what I recall of its beginnings. The very start.

Chronicle of fear

I am standing in front of the glass door and I say to myself: up until yesterday the world was uninhabited. But in a tolerable way, like an apartment whose owners are on vacation. Today it is a tomb, wide open and empty. The Roman sentries about to faint. No, just one sentry.

I wonder what to do. Where to hide, where to find refuge.

I won't go home again, I say to myself, that's impossible. And I won't stay here. Here there were sixty, seventy people, and they are all dead, no doubt of that anymore. Every one of those rooms upstairs is a slab in the morgue.

But elsewhere it is all the same, I reply to myself. Every house, every room, is a coffin.

Nature, though, lives on elsewhere. With all its usual manifestations: rain, now turning to sleet, beginning to lay a white cover on the road. This is *natural*, of this earth.

Who knows, I reply. In every depiction of agonizing death, there is frost and ice in addition to flames. I don't want to believe it but I could well be dead myself, like the others.

And yet, I am breathing, and moving. Not long ago I ate some chocolate.

I *seem* to be breathing, and eating. But it is an illusion.

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I look around for the tinfoil from the chocolate. It's there by my feet on the carpet, but it doesn't reassure me.

The night (I say to myself) when I came back from the cave of the siphon, I went to bed with the black-eyed girl, the Browning 7.65. And I know I pulled the trigger. And that gun doesn't jam.

And did you aim it well?

I pointed it at my mouth. And in the morning there was blood on the pillow.

But the dead don't see themselves or their own blood that they have spilled.

How do we know that the dead don't see themselves?

I pulled the trigger. But did I remove the Browning's safety? I don't think so. The blood on the pillow can be otherwise explained; I hit my head on a rock.

Excuses. To pretend I'd survived. I had to be an exception. Instead, the night of June 2 was my last, too. The rest of it, the aftermath, is nothing but a trick of solipsistic presumption.

No, it's not true that I insisted on being an exception.

Yes, I did insist and I'm certain of it, even though I pretended to doubt, and to consider the alternative.

In any event, as of yesterday, everything has changed.

And I, too, have changed. As of yesterday I've begun to understand that death is certain to come, and that something is keeping it back, and it's not kindness, and not sleep, either. Something that resembles a precipice. A profound experience, very profound. But down, not up.

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Fear takes root in paralyzing trauma, it rants and raves. It's inevitably a disease of discursive reason; it doesn't affect angels and animals.

THE UNKNOWN is upon me, and I am alone, with no means of escape. I have no aid, and no counsel. Who can I hope will save me? Science and philosophy, maybe, which are still with me, if only in the tiniest degree, and in glimmers. But they didn't predict any of what has happened, and are ignorant of it. It is I who knows that in any case; what is happening is not contemplable, it goes beyond that.

A human creature is not born to face *this*. That's the one thing I know for certain. It is therefore a mistake, a shocking sort of negligence, that a single human being should have been left behind.

The last man. Man in a double sense, but one of these two senses doesn't interest me here. I don't judge myself, I have no assessments to make. It's clear that I have survived, and that is distinctly absurd, unfair, and grotesque.

Let me die. For better or for worse I must join them. I was not different from them; they all resembled me. Including the ignorance and the presumption.

The woman from abroad who wanted to know about those window grates at St. Vilcifredo, the plump little woman dressed in pink, ate her lunch, played bridge, and then was *assumed*. Where and how doesn't matter. She is no longer here.

I am still here, and chasms of fear yawn open in me. Fear that grows concentrated even as it spreads, as it saturates everything. A gelid black substance in which I'm miserably, foolishly stuck, like a fly frozen in ice. "Where can I go?" I wonder, "Where can I hide?" And I understand that I cannot go anywhere, the fear is all around, and identical. Once I had the singular vice of solipsism, and my word (to the others) was No Trespassing. And then I found the exit barred to me, indefinitely. When an earthquake struck, we used to take comfort in the fact it would end. Now it doesn't end, I can't hope anymore to hear the "danger's over" signal, the all-clear. Time has stopped.

Before me, who was ever afraid? It wasn't fear, that sensation that always came to an end sooner or later, that affected some or many at once, that was shared, spread around. Foreseen. That some even sought out and enjoyed, maybe. I keep on thinking that fear was born for me, and in fact I have the proof, that it was created for me, against me, that I'm the target, the goal.

And everything is fear. This snow out of season, the stagnant air with its cemetery smell, the outsized throb of the electric clock, these lights that skewer me. I've been sitting here all night, my head between my knees, hands pressed to the back of my neck like someone awaiting a beating. Yesterday, also.

I'm cold. Outside the snow keeps falling. I get up; I've seen a bottle of Hennie water on a table, and I drink some. Back to the chair, where I cover myself once again with Battaglia's redingote and close my eyes. For a few moments, my mind drifting, I return to my usual native unhappiness. The one I've hauled along with me for years, and that now, tried and true, feels comforting.

I finger the past absentmindedly, a rough past. I test myself in a search for lost time, which on the whole, whether it involves recovering distant or recent experience, offers me little.

Once more I coast by that island that Karpinsky has been in my life. I struggle to reconstruct him in all the details of his person—his physical person, and I tell myself that his ordinariness, and the carelessness with which he dressed, were meaningful—I try to reconstruct his behavior toward me, and toward Wanhoff, who detested him, and toward the other patients. I struggle, but the results are meager.

On the lawn behind the clinic a gardener is mowing the grass, and from the window of my room I watch Karpinsky walk up to him, and bend to pick some spontaneous flowers, wild flowers. I'm lying, dressed, on my bed and Karpinsky says, "Yes, I'm going to spring you from this place soon, but keep in mind that you will have to suffer." Contrary to Wanhoff's rules, Karpinsky has agreed to sit at my table in the dining room while I eat. I'm chatting away and I ask him how old he is and discover that he's the younger of us two. "Fact remains," he says to me, "you have a lot more years ahead of you than I do."

A prediction that proved correct. (But how did he know that?) I'm still here suffering. Purifying myself?

Dr. Karpinsky (I'm thinking aloud), remember me.

I'm talking nonsense; the dead have the gift of nonexistence. Of not seeing in any case, not hearing, not knowing. Impassive, as Mylius put it.

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I am alive, I'm still on this earth.

On this earth, there is no eternity, only moments, hard as they are to calculate. Trauma admits intermittence; just now I sneezed, outside the snow's no longer falling, a spider, or a huge fly, is slowly

measuring out Battaglia's mahogany countertop.

An idea runs through me, this time a coherent thought, not a ghost or a memory. A thought that creates a connection.

Not that I have analyzed or examined the matter; I don't have the desire or the strength. But I did replay the scene of the beginning of the end, the scene of the prologue to the Event. In the cave of the siphon. Between two cells of a random one of my cerebral gyri, a link formed, involuntary and absolutely automatic. *I was exempted* because I was inside a cave. Inside a mountain.

That meant the consequences (my separate fate) were fortuitous, and physical in nature. This still doesn't explain what happened, and even less other subsequent events. But it allows me to embrace a provisory explanation; the logic of function and fiction* makes sense again.

And more important, it suggests possible action to take, something to try. It's comforting. It permits me to sleep. I slept for a couple of hours in fact. True sleep.

And now I'm thinking.

There were various other human beings on the night of June 2 in environmental circumstances similar to mine. All around the world, but also here near Widmad. I mean the miners at Alpa. At Alpa there's a gold quartz mine.

When I awake it is dark, around three or four in the morning. I'm weary, my mind fragmentary and clouded as when coming out of total anesthesia, and when I look around I'm unable to understand where I am and what's happening. I have only a vague desire to move and the warmth of some uneasy hope. Prying myself from my chair, I go to look through the glass. I can't unwind, the cold and the inertia make me tense. Nevertheless, something has been set right. I have a plan, and with it, I sense, I can chase death away from me and from around me.

I will return to the real, the human. The human.

I'll go to Alpa. Will I make it?

First, I'll need a minimum of energy, I must eat. Eat. And I must also wait until day comes; I've never been to the mine, I don't know the way. So I'll wait.

I'm retracing my thoughts of the past. I call up the time-honored image (mine, I invented it just a few days ago) of the pyramid, or rather the two pyramids, facing in different directions and joined at their bases. At the top point, the original hominid, forefather of the human race, down to the billions of men living in the final era. And from those billions back to the successor: the second pyramid shrinks rapidly down to me, survivor and heir, the only exemplar of the species still alive.

But the two points, top and bottom, have no substance, they are mere symbols. There was no original progenitor, hominid or man, that's just a conjecture. And thus, at the bottom of the inverse pyramid, the individual at the point—me—cannot, finally, be anything but a mental construct. Geometrically, it's simple: the apex of a pyramid, upright or upside down as it may be, is a mere point. With no substance. So I have no grounds to exist.

Exercises in logic, these; innocuous, free of substance. Quite different from genuine ratiocination. This kind of thought is a good omen for me, it suggests my crisis is coming to an end. I'm recovering, coming up the slope. Ready to begin again.

STILL, the fear could come back. I'll rely on a reagent then, to neutralize it.

The basic danger—the human being—is no more. The rest, what's alive, is harmless: it is nature, in me and around me. Under the circumstances, any ordinary individual in my place would have a good chance of dying of old age. Illnesses are socially transmitted, directly, or indirectly (in the latter case, as in ailments caused by the tension that once derived from a shared existence, and so forth.) Now, there's not much more than a bolt of lightning that can touch me, or an earthquake or a meteorite. Remote things.

It's conceivable, I suppose, that the Event could repeat itself, directed specifically at me, but only just conceivable, and it would be presumptuous to fear it. It was a global phenomenon, aimed at the genus, not the individual. A single person's unlikely to be rewarded or punished, that would be a waste. It would make no sense to replay the world championship of soccer just to test *one* individual, even if he were a revenant Pelé.

Now that the crisis is over, I react with exaggerated good cheer. With moony superficial optimism. Was that predictable?

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A minor problem remains, however, a benevolent problem. I wonder what I'll do. Precisely in the banal sense of how I'll occupy myself, how I'll fill up my days.

Necessities? Alas, I won't have any, they've all been provided. For centuries humanity has labored with the sole intent of accumulating reserves. Food, drink, clothing. Fuel. Thanks to their work, I will not return to the animal—or Marxian—state, where the individual is entirely engaged in an effort to produce, and lives only to acquire the means to live. It was that animal state I was counting on, to avoid boredom and the so-called worm of doubt. Now I have no idea what to fall back on. Woe to *him that is alone*, (for there is no end to his toil)*: does the ancient curse now merely condemn me to forced leisure time? That would be odd. The successor's plight is forced membership in a working man's club?

I'm rambling. When I was eighteen, I took part in the usual youthful transgressions (dropping acid), and I was pretty sure that sooner or later I was going to end up in the madhouse. Another risk I no longer face. It's not that a person *is* crazy, he or she is held to be crazy (or holds him or herself so) in relation to behavior different from his/her own. A point of comparison is needed, as when you want to establish whether someone is sexually manly or not. Adam didn't think to himself, "I'm so manly," because he had no point of comparison. By the same token, I cannot go crazy.

I'm rambling. I empty my bowels. I eat. I have postponed the visit to Alpa. I sleep again, two hours, no dreams. The day passes like this; outside it is snowing again. When I wake I feel comfortable. I move over to touch the radiators. They are hot. A thermostat has switched on deep in the heart of the Mayr; Providence (technology) exists and has come to my aid. I'd better atone; I regret my past skepticism, it's offensive.

So well-being has arrived, finally, and relative security. Tomorrow I'll go to Alpa. Now, it's enough to get my strength back.

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To get to Alpa, I'll need a means of transportation. But I'm not going to drive the same compact car I always choose. I don't want to get too close to *their* personal things.

I set out on foot. I have to climb almost 2,000 meters; the road snakes back and forth up the coldest and poorest slope of Widmad. My mountaineering instincts help me to locate and follow the shortcuts. I soon arrive at the roof of the valley, a roof of dark clouds knitted together.

I head into the clouds, meeting the shadows I left behind down below, and simultaneously remembering an obscure passage from the Apocalypse that the good Borges chose as the epigraph to one of his stories. It's a strange thing to recall, timely too: as the end of the world approached, some people in search of salvation went to live in caves and grottoes in the mountains, went the story. This Apocalypse, and Borges with it, lend a timid confidence to the difficult road I've taken. I was tired before I left and have no support beyond my Spanish brandy and those scattered writings.

When I arrive it is, or seems to be, afternoon. Fresh snow blankets the shacks of the mining village. There's a large hut of corrugated sheet metal where they crush the stone. A cable car station, a power transformer cabin, a dozen chalets. The settlement's before me, but not the settlers; I see none. If I do see

some, live ones, that will disprove the Apocalypse, and I'll feel I'm a character in a book. The world will become a double world, flimsy and ambiguous like the symbolic ones Borges embroidered. But at least that despicable alternative will disappear. Me: chosen one, or outcast.

No one comes forward, though. On the mountainside a row of iron pylons leads up to the tunnel into the mountain. I explore a long stretch, keeping close to the rails of the narrow-gauge Decauville track. The tunnel is very hot, all the lights are on; I stumble over piles of tools on the ground, picks, hammers, shovels. Miner's helmets with lamps. The people who were using them, wearing them on their heads, are not here. I'm about to turn back when a roll of thunder nails me to the wall.

O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort.

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For an instant, fear overwhelms me again. I wait, trembling, for the rocks to come churning down, sealing me in this enormous tomb forever. I have the time to remark on the sacrilegious audacity that brought me here, and to curse it. I wouldn't have time to escape, and I don't try to.

The rumbling grows distant. Or decreases. It stops.

Step by step I return outside. I take a breath. There are no men, no human beings, neither alive nor dead, inside or out. Only a dog or two whose howling reaches my ears, the rain beating down, and me.

I must convince myself that I am alone. No fairy tales, no "sarcasm *en dentelles*" after Borges, none of his lace-edged sarcasm. I'm stuck in a gigantic, empty universe in which there's no room for mirrors that multiply, for labyrinths and loopholes, avoidable magic, allusive warnings. Everything is linear and unidirectional. As solid and lacking in handholds as glass, where nothing points to anything if not to my insignificance, my ignorance, my perfect inadequacy. No equivocal ambiguities, no enigmas to resolve, apart from the disproportion between events and the person involved. There is but one way forward for me, resignation. Someone is enjoying the immense irony of this disproportion. Exemplary cautionary tales will be drawn from it.

In their cafeteria, the absent miners kept stores of dried beef, hardtack, beer, and Italian wine. I eat, and my physical resilience is in its way mysterious; the entrepreneurs of early detection would be dismayed. It is only now that fatigue, cold, bitterness, and fear knock me down and I fall into a stony sleep, my head on the table.

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Today I discovered what was causing the cadaverish stink that's been haunting me for the past few days at the Mayr. On top of a delivery van in the alleyway beside the hotel, I found a number of cages full of chickens. Dead, long dead, and decomposing. Dead poultry tends to *become flesh*, undeniably real, and this is one of the things that terrify me. There's the plane of the natural and the causal, and the one of the unnatural and the inexplicable, and the coexistence of the two intensifies the unnatural and the inexplicable.

It appears my fate is to oscillate between the two planes. Like swimmers in a pool, but not so comfortably.

Swimmers. Between gusts of wet, soaking wind I built a sort of carnival set of plastic and papier-mâché in the square in front of City Hall. Widening the breach I'd made in a window of the Grand Emporium, I carried out twenty or so mannequins. I chose the ones in the department with the End of Season sale, slightly old-fashioned mannequins, the most realistic, with wigs. And I set them out in bunches in the middle of the piazza. The place livened right up and took on its usual appearance. Even realer than what I remember. Plastic and papier-mâché. The great Roland Barthes, writing about plastic, eminently maintained that matter is far more prized than life.* I take other, feminine mannequins to the city swimming pool, surging beneath the gusts of Föhn behind the square. To one foot of each, I attach a brick and toss them in. I've calculated the weight well; they don't sink, but float, the whole bust above the water. My swimmers gather and disperse, bob cheerfully up and down in the puzzled waters.

When I return to the piazza, the wind, coming at it from one side, has lashed out at my friends. They lie on the ground in patches of melting snow, beaming their intrepid smiles toward the heavens, like those who were left in the square in front of the Winter Palace after the Cossacks had fired on the crowd.*

I collect them patiently, one by one. This time I seat them in the automobiles stubbornly waiting in the parking lot. It's true that they are jointed, yet I realize that no force is needed to get them into the cars, they go willingly. Human beings resume their privileged habits with ease.

Especially because those automobiles are still *alive*. I try one of the keys and the engine responds. After

pumping the accelerator a couple of times, I find the car idles well. Even that.

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It's late in the evening, and I've spent the entire day in my morgue-hotel. At night, an old prompting seizes me, and I look for a typewriter in the office, and shove a sheet of paper in it. Once a journalist . . . : it seems one remains true to the instincts of the ruminating intellectual. Nothing's wasted; any experience can be recycled if the usual filters are employed.

I type out half a page.

The human-centered type of immanence has become an inescapable rule, just as the idealistic type once was. We have reduced the universe of reality to mankind, not excluding science. Now mankind seems to have disappeared, but panhumanism has not, and everything, even the night of June 2, can be resolved using its terms. The solution is sarcasm, "lace-edged" sarcasm, and cheerful humor. The car engine will start up again: A *Dissipatio H.G.* doesn't prevent a carburetor from regulating the carburation. The proprietors in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, subject to the Last Judgment, and their cars down there, are ready to roll out. The Last Judgment, what's the point? Our century preceded it. The damned and the supposed blessed filled the many, huge Chrysopolises. The Valley of Jehoshaphat is our century, which was always *making distinctions*, according to its innumerable, rigorous rules.

I leave the office and my text, not particularly pleased with myself.

Not pleased, and not convinced. I don't actually believe in immanence. And pan-humanism is a *fad*, as my ex-colleague Lopez would have said. A fashion. A fashion that has endured for a while and still does because there is one conformist left—and it will endure as long as that conformist does.

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Nevertheless, I've come back from terror to routine, and recovering one's habits is a positive thing when one is traumatized. The habit of strumming on a typewriter, the pleasure (even if sloppy, or morbid) of intellectualizing ordinary experiences, including those that are highly personal and all but inconfessable.

Charles, or Carlos, Lopez. A walk-on character in the not entirely agreeable *commedia* of my thirty-, thirty-two-year-old existence. I have no idea why he turns up again on such a different stage, and an empty one.

A North American, he was the correspondent of a New York financial weekly in Chrysopolis when I met him. Lately promoted to write a column for a Washington paper. To him I owe my meeting with the sweet Henriette, who from all appearances was part of his harem and so technically I pinched her from him, without losing his sympathies. Carlos had a gift for friendship of a formal kind, and he was one of those who took part in the annual extortion of greetings. At Christmas and other holidays he would send me marvelous, exceptionally beautiful cards. With messages of impassioned encouragement to *put out*. To produce, to publish? Publish what?

"He was," "he would send." Carlos was my age. There's still no reason to speak of him in the past tense.

Anyway, I can check on it. The Mayr has a number of eminent American clients; a list of phone numbers is not likely to be lacking at the desk.

There is a list, and the clock in the vestibule points to ten minutes before midnight. It will be six PM on the East Coast, certainly not an hour when a columnist would be expected to be in the office. But someone will answer. The intercontinental phone lines won't be tied up these days and I'll be able to speak to someone quickly—that is, if someone there is able to speak. I dial the number, preceded by a litany of prefixes.

Three, four seconds go by. A woman's voice. You've reached Washington, DC, and this is the *Washington Post*. Today, Saturday June 1 and tomorrow, Sunday, June 2, the publisher's offices are closed. To speak to an editor, please dial the following numbers . . .

A woman's voice. Recorded. As at the office of the dentist Ibn Yussef, Ahmed, in Paris. And the message hasn't changed since Saturday June 1. Them too. Over there as well.

The broad American accent rings in my ear: "Uàscinton Di Si."

I LINGER in front of the door of the phone booth, humiliated by the foolish outcome. It occurs to me that because I am not personally “aligned” with the Western bloc, I ought to try—in order to be scrupulously impartial—to telephone Moscow, Peking, or Tirana. At the same time I’m thinking to myself, the night of June 2 didn’t distinguish between East and West, it’s pointless, I’ve phoned enough. In that instant, the phone booth still open, someone calls me.

The (masculine) timbre of the voice doesn’t sound like that of someone speaking through a receiver. In any case, the receiver can’t be working. I hang it back up.

“Yes,” says the man, “you recognize me, it’s me.” I recognize the voice. “It’s me and I’ll prove it; do you remember that poem you taught me? Here are the first couple of verses.” He recites them. “Now listen to me. I know you need help, and I can help you. I hope we’ll soon meet where you were unable to follow me.”

The hallucination (am I hallucinating?) is crystal clear and precise, there is no sophistry to it, and nothing frightening about it. It is good. It is calming. I didn’t recall the detail Karpinsky refers to, but he is right. I had only just arrived at the clinic a few days before when I read Karpinsky the opening lines of a poem by a well-known Latin-American writer. “The stethoscope falls on a white coat. * Under the white coat, a shirt, under the shirt, a chest. In that chest, a heart.”

The circumstances in which I heard his voice were ordinary, but I have no doubt about the fact that he spoke to me from some place far more distant than Washington, DC, from a place that isn’t of this earth. I don’t need to think about it to know that, my intuition tells me with absolute certainty. He convenes me. For when? Tomorrow, if I wish. Where? Where does he reside now? No: here, down here. He’ll come down here. Didn’t he say, “You need help, I’ll help you.”

So, where? Once a week, Saturday or Sunday, Karpinsky was free to take the day off from his work in the clinic, and we wouldn’t see him. A friend of his, Carlini, told me the doctor was a believer and had a position in his church in the city. Someone else told me that no, he was active in politics, likewise in the city. That he was an activist in one of those dissident circles that went under the name of *rayons* (rays) or *Fäustchen* (fist, diminutive) and once upon a time were ungenerously known as “extremist sects.” In any case, he didn’t speak of it. I myself asked him how he spent his free time and he replied, “Come with me and you’ll see.” But Wanhoff the director advised me not to leave the premises, and I did not insist. Which explains Karpinsky’s final words: “Where you were unable to follow me.” He did give me a hint, though.

This paradoxical new world of mine admits dear and pious ghosts, it admits a Karpinsky. Ghosts that curiously address me using the formal *Lei*, not *tu*, and speak from telephone booths. The medium, fortunately, is not the message. The message is benevolence, aid.

I’ll see Chrysopolis again, the city is Chrysopolis.

Morning has just dawned, and I search for my little car. This time I’m not shy about it, and I find it, as well as a small surprise that seems a good omen. A baby ibex is stretched out on the ground between the wheels; it has fallen asleep out of the rain. The mother and some other adult goats are grazing on the lawn of the Hôtel Kursaal. I’ve never met such a large group of these animals, even high in the mountains. At Claus where my valley ends on the plain, I walk around a factory. A sign in large letters on the fence says, *Our detergents are 93% biodegradable*. In the meantime, the factory workers and the customers are one hundred percent biodegraded. The ibex have noticed and are taking advantage.

Passing through the silent outskirts of Chrysopolis, I stop at the synagogue of the Community of the Temple, a famous heirloom left by Gropius among the houses in this neighborhood in the suburbs. I climb the stairs, wait. I don’t expect to talk to him; this new encounter with him will be mute. I just need to have him in front of me. He saw me leave (I say to myself), he can see me right now, he knows I’ve been called to meet him. The Community of the Temple advises, by way of a sign, that there is another synagogue available to would-be attenders, that of the Temple of the Son of Zion—Chief Rabbinate. Not far away.

But is it certain that Karpinsky—although he’s Polish and exhibits certain somatic traits—is Jewish?

Doubt broadens my research. I climb, under the rain, toward the center of town and turn onto Calvinstrasse. I recognize the Evangelical Methodist church, and others: this street is a great flowering of cultural devotion. I move on to the headquarters of the Society of Friends (Quakers). After pausing there for a bit, I proceed toward the Association of Reformed Christians. I don’t look at the venerable cathedral of the Great Monastery behind me; I don’t think my friend would have chosen the cathedral. Too well

known, overrun with tourists. Apart from that exception, I finger one by one the rosary beads of the city's sacred institutions. Église Évangélique Libre. Karpinsky, a foreigner, might have belonged to one of the odd denominations like the Assemblée Évangélique des Frères, or further along, the Église Biblique. No trace of Karpinsky. Or at least I don't "hear" him.

I'm beginning to get tired, but I persist. I must find him, he can't have deceived me.

I cross the first of the great avenues that lead down to the lake and enter the business district. If a wide array of religious denominations can be found in the residential areas, the financial and trade center offers no fewer:

United Lutheran Church
National Lutheran Synod
Church of St. Theresa
Chapel of the World Missions
Parish Church of St. Mark
Sanctuary of the Sacred Fount
Chiesa Parocchiale di Santa Maria del Popolo
Catholic-Christian Church of the Apostles (So there was a Catholic-Christian faith at Chrysopolis, as well as simple Catholic.)
Iglesia Evangelica Española
Church of Pius X
House of the Catholic-Christian Alliance
Piccola Basilica dell'Immacolata (A 1/16 scale copy of the Basilique du Sacré-Coeur in Montmartre, painted by Utrillo.)
The churches of St. Martin, Corpus Domini and St. Jeanne de Chantal
Church of the Adoration of the Sacred Heart (Built in the Secession style, it looks like a movie house. Not tremendously inviting for mystical purposes.)
The Chapel of Our Lady of Lourdes ("Sundays Only." In compensation, there's a real grotto next to it and even a real miniature waterfall.)
Russian Orthodox Church
Ukrainian Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ
Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, church and parish
Chapel of the Infant Jesus, of the Visitandine Sisters
Christ Church, Anglo-Catholic
Christ's Chapel of the Free Christian Brotherhood
Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints

My hope, though waning, is slow to expire altogether. I visit these houses of worship one after another, contrite and dull as an Easter pilgrim to Rome.

I stand in front of closed doors, look around; then I concentrate, keep my ears open.

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Melancholy, not bitter, the return to Widmad. My friend has been held up elsewhere; or else I misunderstood.

But a little irony about our fair city would not be out of place. It hosted, with careful deference and to its inestimable profit, the headquarters of fifty-six banks. (That was one bank for every 7,000 inhabitants while Paris had one for every 40,000 people, and London one per 50,000.) And, one eye on the stock market indexes, soul aimed toward the heavens, the banks were flanked by almost that many churches, adorned with domes and towers, marble floors and trim, and stained-glass windows rich in Biblical legends. A city devoted to Holy Plutocracy. Chrysopolis-Christopolis: I could call it that and any Max Weber could reconcile the contradictions. But I don't have the heart to ironize, to intellectualize. Meditative, I drive my little wagon of the apocalypse over the smooth, silent, odor-free asphalt, the asphalt of eternity.

Waiting for Karpinsky? No, quite the contrary. It's Karpinsky who's waiting for me. It's I who's making him wait, misunderstanding his invitation. I've been searching for him in temples built of wood or of stone, when for him the divine is vast and free. In the clinic, the staff imagined he was a deacon or sacristan, a man who could go and take Communion in the eyes of a lover. He's the one who's waiting, he's the disappointed one, disappointed by my conformism.

But not so disappointed as never to speak to me again. He'll speak to me.

For the last time last night, I slept in the hall at the Mayr.

Today I'll move to the station, beyond the station, to a freight train. Perhaps it's my asceticism. But more than that, it's the sound impulse that once led people to take refuge in trains when earthquakes or bombardments struck. The train represents a provisory solution, but also mobility, theoretical escape. At the Grand Emporium I find the necessities to furnish my new residence. Among those necessities, a portable typewriter. The car where I'll be staying is one of those used to repair the lines (the symbolism didn't fail to strike me), and in fact there's another car ahead of it that's full of bolts and railroad ties. My old goatherd's hut was a palace by comparison, but there are some comforts. The rail workers had a kind of lodge with a stove, chairs, and a table at which I can eat and where I can put my typewriter, as well as berths to sleep on, a small pantry, lamps and kerosene. *Where I can put my typewriter:* me, shipwreck of shipwrecks. In what bottle will I seal my manuscripts, to what waves will I confide them? I haven't asked myself the question.

Here's something important, however. Nobody in my new residence has *passed away*. On the night of June 2, between Saturday and Sunday, the car was certainly empty. It welcomes me with a good clean smell of rough pinewood.

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And thus I've taken permanent possession of the Inheritance. I'm fully aware of the situation. Trans-historic, post-theological, metaphysical it may be, absurd, impossible, but I'm digging in. I shall take from it what I can.

Karpinsky once told me of an episode in the Freud-Jung correspondence. Jung wrote to Freud, on a postcard: "I propose a summary of our experience as psychologists in four words: Inside and out, man is a creature of habit."

Freud replied: "Agreed! And allow me to add a footnote. The more traumatic the stimulus, the more urgent and vital the need to adapt."

I ADAPT. Intermittently.

I have spent hours thinking about whether I'll fall back on the black-eyed girl.

What are the chances that I'll try again? None, I think. Because suicide requires a beneficiary, or beneficiaries. Someone whom we have decided to punish or, on the other hand, to instruct (see Brutus). I have no beneficiaries, and so I can no longer kill myself, just as I can no longer send a telegram.

This is sophistry.

To begin with, there's a question to be resolved: To what extent am I still alive? That is, the possible subject or object of suicide? That pitiful doubt is fundamental; indeed, if I were to take my own doubts seriously, those of a Hamlet or a Descartes would appear mere jests by comparison. Inertia and cowardice, hiding behind decorous excuses, hold me back. Pretexts. My agnosticism was but willed ignorance; my amoral readiness, pure escapism. Pretexts. I could define myself thus: a funerary mentality that encounters actual death with dismay, while yearning for the essence of Death, Death triumphant and universal (from which of course one is exempted.) Someone who has created this entire story down to the last detail, invented the so-called Event of the night of June 2, in order to have a haven of hope, to realize the ancient dream of immortality, an immortality (we understand) that is mine alone, alone as I always wanted my life to be.

And so this entire story is merely the lugubrious invention of a crazed solipsist—and petty slacker—who stubbornly refuses to believe he will die.

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This morning I was awake before daylight, after a dreamless sleep. Awake, and soon thereafter I was on my feet walking, in a state of perfect automation. Or a raptus.

In the waking subject a raptus is caused by a) a permanent condition of stress, or b) an acute emotional impulse. In my case both causes pertain and the condition is imposed, forced: it's mine and that of outside forces at once. I started up the car and drove off without, for a while, having any idea of what I was looking for or where I was headed. In practice, my destination was Teklon, the airport. My reflexes quite pointlessly readied, I drove fast. I was crying.

In truth, howling. Not in fear, not in pain—in agony. A frantic nostalgia, the harsh privation of and bitter regret for an irreparable loss. In forty minutes I was at Teklon. Without an instant of hesitation I headed for the offices, in a building to the right of the airport entrance that I had never before entered. I searched for cardboard and paper to write on. I made twenty or so signs, working feverishly, and then I placed them around the customs' hall, the ticket office, in the bars and outside in the plaza leading to the runways. They all said the same thing: "Anyone who comes by please contact me, please get in touch"—the message was written in English, lingua franca of airports—"whoever you are, for heaven's sake come find me or get me word somehow. I am at Widmad, only thirty-seven kilometers away. Look for the man-who-was, there is but one of me. The person writing this is that same ex-person, he's all there is."

Consciousness was not yet will; I did what I did without proposing that I do it, passively, and the text of my message proves it. Gratefully, I accepted the relief it brought me. I saw nothing at Teklon, my stay there was brief. I think I saw, out there on the runway, that the Tupolev 62 is still resting a fraternal wing on the Pan Am DC9.

I'm at Widmad now. Wondering whether I was dreaming, whether I just invented this parenthetical anxiety to find people. Invented it, I mean, in order to justify my actions.

And now I'm back home. I think back to the vision of those two airplanes side by side on the runway. It could be paramnesia. But halfway up the valley, did I or did I not discover that the creek had flooded the road? My wheels sank into the water up to the hubcaps. I go to look at the car; it's lathered with mud, fresh mud. I drove those roads, it's not paramnesia.

This problem of paramnesia, of false memories, already afflicted me back at Villa Verde, during the final period in the clinic, when I was getting better. Karpinsky tried to reassure me: "Not at all—no need to be alarmed, the matter has nothing to do with your neurosis. No, the Analysis considers this a positive symptom. And here," he said smiling, "we can put our faith in the Analysis."

O Dr. Karpinsky, I beg you. I need to see you. I don't care where or how. But we must meet.

At times I find myself talking to him aloud, as if he were here before me.

Karpinsky, my friend, I have no one but you. Transference has nothing to do with it, and you know that. I am alone. The world is me, and I am tired of this world, this me. Show yourself, please.

I burst into the vestibule of the Hôtel Victoria, scattering gangs of cats that were evidently up to no good. For two hours now I've been at work stacking up chairs, carpets, newspapers, anything I can find that's combustible.

The Victoria took its name from the days when Queen Victoria, crowned empress of the Indies at the urging of her minister Disraeli, a Jew and an intemperate English nationalist, stayed here in 1890. With its bald domes, its hoary festive air of invitation, it's a relic of colonialism at 1,200 meters above sea level. I've decided to rid the valley of this anachronism by setting it on fire. I am certainly no pyromaniac; just the opposite, I suffer from pyrophobia, and Karpinsky knew it. However, I've discovered a newborn hatred for the gouty little queen, Victoria, and it astonishes me that not just Lytton Strachey but the great Gandhi himself spoke so kindly of her.

At two fifteen PM exactly I light the avenging match. By two thirty, the sitting room has become a pyre, and I leave. I go out to wash off under the rain. I'm covered in ancient dust up to the armpits and sooty all the way to my ears. While I wash myself I notice that in the direction of the plain, to the north, the clouds are breaking, or lifting. The rain turns silvery. On that side, the heavens seem to look down on things attentively. On my works.

My friend, not tangibly present, not material, is nevertheless here; he reveals himself in strange and unexpected ways, but he's here.

The bookstore in front of the station is the only shop not offering me anything, nothing I can use, nothing that has anything to do with me. Of all the successors, the worst of all possible successors has been chosen, or at least, the least bookish. I haven't opened a book, old or new, for years.

It was *he* who guided me toward the bookstore. In the window, the usual vanity fiction, in four languages, the usual mass market nonfiction. In the center sits a tome with a pale-blue jacket trimmed in red. A *Guide Bleu*? I look again; it's not the *Guide Bleu*. Where the title ought to be appear two lines printed in Italian. *Ti aspetto. Non qui.* He's waiting for me, but not here.

It wouldn't be hard to lay hands on the book, I'd simply have to break a window. But I don't consider it. It doesn't arouse my curiosity that the words are printed in Italian, which he didn't speak, didn't understand. Nor does it surprise me that I hadn't noticed that book the couple of times I passed by the shop in these last few weeks. I have other questions to put to myself.

First of all, while he has kept his promise, will I be able to keep mine? He says, "not here." And therefore certainly not at Widmad. So I will have to abandon the sole plan I've been able to make, or that instinct has imposed. (A defensive, or conservationist instinct—or the comfortable resumption of habit?) I'll have to leave my trusted Widmad. Leave, for where?

Just the other day I swore to myself I would never go beyond Lewrosen again. Below Lewrosen. Not only was this commitment made completely freely, but there are also my inhibitions to consider. I cannot go back to my house up the mountain. I can no longer go, here in Widmad, to the southwest part of the town, where the skulls vanished, which means I'll never get as far as the outdoor market, the wooden bridge, or the Zemmi, my beautiful creek.

I can no longer look at myself in the mirror. Because I am sure that fear has been engraved on my face. I carry it on me.

I no longer use the mirror, yet I still shave with care every morning. I'm beginning to reacquire a taste for personal cleanliness. Right now—it's not raining—I'm in the pool with my swimmers; the water's heated and I have soap and a sponge and I'm scrupulously washing myself. Soon I'll get out of the pool and dust myself with some sweet-smelling talcum powder. Then on with the pantyhose, a (superfluous) garter belt decorated with pale-blue rosettes, and some gigantic lacy panties.

For a few days now, I've been wearing women's underwear, obtained from the Grand Emporium.

My physical heft, which has grown, adapts pretty well to these unusual garments, although my muscles do swell the nylon of the stockings dangerously. When I undress in the evening I'm not troubled, either physically and psychically; those powerful, hairy legs look merely clownish beneath their black veil. I expect I'll extend this style of dress to outerwear as well; women's clothes are inviting, now that the foolish fad for female trousers has subsided, and they don't weigh on you this time of year. I saw a white dress with red polka dots, an underskirt, and bolero. There's nothing autoerotic about any of this, I might add; my sexuality has never seemed to me deviant, and anyway, for quite a while now it has languished, as it should.

If anything, I imitate the great Japanese actor Omagàta, who played only women's roles, dressed as a woman. But there's no hint of any kind of mental disorder in me; my reason is precise, vertical, unassailable. In my case, at present, madness is to be excluded. My reason calmly processes events and

experiences, tries to extract ego-fundamentalist, ego-inflationist juices. Without any direct involvement on my part; I just let it act. I wouldn't, however, exaggerate the importance of rational thought, which plays a consultative and representative role in human behavior. In me and in anyone, a healthy dose of illogic probably has beneficial effects, conveys immunity; it's a normal defense mechanism, like antibodies.

REASON intact, garrulous to the point of presumption, the individual in me is liquidating. The psychic individual, *bien entendu*. I'm an ex-person.

There are long-ago precedents: when I was twenty I would ask myself, what am I, what sort of human being will I be? My pessimism was rhetorical, though. I did come up to the human average (with a degree of approximation, a narrow fluctuation above and below), and I maintained it. An example: I often called myself *bête*, stupid, an animal. Something *une bête* does not do. For a normal person functioning under normal circumstances, such uncertainty is formally contradictory, psychologically specious. *Ça sent la littérature*. It smells of literature.

Why am I now, ever since June 2, an ex-person?

There's an obvious interpretation, which is: the social context, interpersonal connections, and the consequences of their disappearance, necessitate it. But these are sociology's wobbly gelatin words, and I discard them immediately in favor of another interpretation: humanity will cease to be when time ceases, and in the same way.

If time is abolished, we presume that humanity as such will lose substance. It's a supposition that smells of *philosophiaillerie*, of pompous philosophizing, but I don't reject it out of hand, it's not banal. Meanwhile, though, why has time been abolished and a year zero established that's destined to remain forever zero? It's my impression that this has been the case since June 2, yet the phenomenon remains to be explained. If time is the shape of internal feeling, so long as there is *internal feeling* (that is to say a conscious individual) there must also be time.

In *The Possessed*, Dostoevsky attempts to provide a theological-poetic explanation. He puts it in the mouth of one of his characters, Kirillov, if I remember correctly; he says, "When mankind achieves true happiness,* time will no longer exist. Time will then be superfluous." So have the dear departed found true happiness? I'd like to think so. The poor things deserve it.

What seems certain is that as a human being, I'm finished. It's not that mine is a half-life. I'm not a specter drinking Don Hermanos brandy, not a corpse smoking Capstan (Navy Cut) in my pipe—but neither am I myself any more, not even that little that I was. I survive thanks to some unknown artifice. Inside a decompression chamber, or under an oxygen tent. Deprived of my identity, and yet, the height of strangeness, fully able to recall it.

What's also certain is that I'm beyond time. A categorical confirmation? The problem of leisure time, free time, no longer affects me. A problem as old as humanity, and (very likely) its original sin, is the question: "Then, *afterwards*, what will I do?" I simply don't ask it of myself. I am discovering that eternity (for one like me studying it from a *parking orbit** in space) is the provisory become permanent. The instant dilates and dilates, and in empirical terms that means a condition that can be eternally postponed. I act, but cannot estimate how long the action will take, I only know it's incalculable. I'm filling my pipe, but when will I be ready to take a match and light it? Will I ever be ready?

A parte objecti,* eternity, I realize, is hardly the orthodox one, it coexists happily with mobility, succession, change, with dawn and dusk. With the hordes of cats (plump and well fed) that jostle in the streets, howling and paying no attention to the mice, of which there are many. There's little that's arcane about it; eternity does not resound with a voice like thunder, as Bach imagined. It's made up of the usual queues of bumper-to-bumper cars, their batteries just slightly depleted, and of neon tubes that emit alternate flashes of the usual chrome yellow and oxyhydrogen blue. A metaphysician, any metaphysician would turn up his nose at this kitsch eternity.

Whoever's responsible doesn't seem to have cared about being thought a great director. He didn't need to.

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These are the thoughts I bring with me as I climb the stairs of the bourse, heading toward the portico that will shelter me from the driving rain.

I've moved here permanently. To what I used to call the Golden City. Not the pious city of the fifty churches. Chrysopolis.

On the night of June 2, logic collapsed and from that moment, it deviated or crumbled piece by piece, yet of all the illogical things that I have seen and heard perhaps the most extravagant is that I am here, and not going away. An ex-person, truly. Out of my skin.

The disgust I felt for this city-symbol was sincere, profound; it was certainly in no way socio-ideological. Nor did it derive from any aesthetic or naturalist preferences; while I considered the Malga Ross the antithesis of the city, nevertheless my Malga Ross was not Gauguin's Tahiti, or Thoreau's Walden.

My aversion had a serious moral basis; it was disapproval, condemnation. Spontaneous. By that I mean, thought out by myself, without the help of Marcuse, maybe with some Savonarola grafted on, or more likely, some evangelical fire from the neo-pietistic revival. Not for nothing did my maternal ancestor (whose name I bear) teach at the *paedagogium* of the illustrious August Hermann Francke.*

The feeling was tortured, miniloquent,* categorical. Impersonal. The early detection industry, the mountain motorways, Henriette: none of these weighed in much.

Today I recognize that I must let the feeling go. Not "in a manner of speaking," not superficially. Unguardedly, wholeheartedly.

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In short, I understand that I must reject what there is that speaks of *me* in that disapproval. A considerable part of my *ego* collapses; for me this is a deep shock, and I don't exaggerate. Disapproval turns out to mean I'm incompatible. Its roots were physical, organic.

A sea swell. After surviving so many trials my tiny paper boat finally falls apart. Curiously, this little catastrophe brings about no positive changes. I'm seized, instead, by a vague but keen desire to repent. And by a pitiful contrition, solace of the neophyte penitent. My zeal is genuine, if somewhat diligent, my intentions firm, if vague (very vague). Yes, what distinguishes this psychological retreat of mine is its sincerity. I've returned to perfect naïveté.

In a different moment, I imagined that very soon men of every race and place must join in solidarity (something I called *socialidarity* or *socio-solidarity*, quite different from humanitarianism or charity), imposed on the Planet of the Economy by ever-shrinking space, bringing to an end all the empty sermonizing on love and peace based on mystical beliefs and tablets of the law. That was many years ago and I was duly disappointed. Anyway, no socialidarity would have been enough to make me accept Chrysopolis. And why therefore do I accept it now? Is this just unwitting self-coercion, or if not unwitting, unwarranted? In practice, gratuitous? The crazy drift of the paper boat come to Chrysopolis to sink.

I'm out of the rain now, under the portico of the stock market, and I take off my jacket to wring it out. The doves and the crows that were milling around underfoot rise up squawking. Crows, or rather the larger ones, ravens, *Corvus corax*, ill-omened birds of the battlefield.* Someone once said the stock market would be humanity's last battlefield. The birds, however, are fraternizing. Never seen anything like it.

When and how did I decide to leave Widmad, the place where, after spending a whole lifetime in Chrysopolis, I had gone to detach myself deliberately—and not in cowardly escape, or merely to enjoy a comfortable retirement, clean air, and meditative silence? Doubtless I was thinking of Karpinsky. His message, the "not here."

If it was his initiative, though, it means Karpinsky stands against all moral judgment, all material truth. Judgment, it is clear, even in the most disinterested conscience, implies condemning something, someone. There is no morality and no justice that doesn't judge and doesn't condemn. He doesn't say: You are wrong to judge Chrysopolis and what it embodies in a certain way. If anything, he makes me feel I must transcend, disavow. Myself. An ascetic tour de force, a high-wire act. Self-disavowal has always seemed to me a kind of spiritualistic freak show.

I have no concrete proof this initiative of mine is directed by Karpinsky. I know he cannot come to me, but the reasons he doesn't don't lie in him. I see his hand in this, thoughtful and diplomatic. He's *worked* on me to bring me to his level, using his deep knowledge of me. He effected the raptus with a series of subtle suggestions.

This is what he wanted to obtain (for me, that is, for my own good, something so secret that I hadn't the slightest suspicion of it), it's what he wanted, and he obtained it. I've said my last farewell to Widmad. I'll never see the Malga Ross again.

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If I were dead, there's just one place I'd like to be buried: at the Malga Ross. Fattening the pinched and scrawny heather and juniper that so kindly received me as a boy, and afterwards. Once it happened, I

don't remember how, that I spoke to Giovanni about that wish. For some reason the memory now comes back to me, bringing his distant smile.

Giovanni made up his mind I was "a bit strange." He shook his head.

"Getting yourself buried in the mountains, in the middle of all those rocks. No, you can't do that, you're not a dog. The regulations forbid it."

"It's obvious you served in the gendarmerie, Giovanni. Alive or dead, regulations come first."

Frederica, from the window of my house: "Don't pay any attention to him. It can be done, if that's what you really want. It can be done soon enough."

"Well, I can't guarantee you it will be so very *soon*."

"A hundred years from now, Giovanni and I won't be here to help you. So if it matters to you, try to get there before we do. How much do you weigh, sir?"

"Over eighty kilos."

"When the time comes, we'll put two forty-kilo bags of sand in the casket. And send it down to town in peace. You, instead, we'll carry up on a mule, and we'll dig a big hole at the place you've marked out for us, and no one will be the wiser."

She wasn't shy, Frederica. I don't think I ever earned a great deal of her affection, but she was always honest with me. Thinking back on it, I'm nostalgic for her, for those days, for my easy life with them, comfortable, safe. Sweet. Giovanni must have been feeling a certain sympathy for me that day.

"But why do you think about dying? You're still young. Doesn't this sun of ours make you feel happy today?"

It was a bright blue day, I remember it, even though the world of us three was completely encircled by the greenish-black fir trees, just barely lit up by the sun glinting off the Karessa glacier, that northern slope they called the Himalayan face at Widmad. But Giovanni gave me too much credit. I wasn't thinking about dying. I exempted myself even then.

AND NOW, if it should happen (if it should be granted to me) where do I want my bones to lie? In the parterre planted with English rye grass in front of the Hôtel Esplanade?

There's a more immediate residential question I've had to face, however. I'd happily have made my home at Teklon, the airport. But Teklon was too emotional a choice, too much inspired by feelings and instinct, while I must be obedient, I must submit. I considered the offices of my former newspaper, and the little villa belonging to Meggy Weiss Lo Surdo. As it happens, the capital reserves of the capital are all mine now. All 25,000 of its dwellings are at my disposal.

I decided, with a certain reluctant consistency, on the restaurant at the Bourse. I sleep or doze, or muse (I muse) on a sofa near a window that faces onto the *place de l'opulence*. The locus of that eternity that was always my destiny. The market of markets elevates, not unlawfully (it seems), into the supernatural. Speculating in stock quotes brings forth metaphysical, maybe even theological speculation. Everything is fatal, mysterious, and acceptable because absurd.

Here in this place, honed and purified, my personal *cupio dissolvi*, too often postponed, was supposed to play out.

In practice: I suffer from the cold at night. I have nothing but tablecloths for blankets. I lack elementary comforts. I look for, and it makes sense, some marginal compensation at least for these minor punishments. The menu of the day, of the Last Day, Saturday June 1, offered, for *le dîner: roti de porc frais Vendôme, fondue Bourguignonne, homard sauce niçoise*. None of them light dishes. Many of the merchants, I think unkindly, transitioned to the metaphysical following or while suffering from digestive problems.

I rummaged around in the management offices, finding not the razor and the blankets I needed, but several millions in currency. It was in the briefcase of a bourse trader, and the restaurant manager had put a note on it: "Left here by Mr. . . . Return to him in person only." Inside the case there was cash in large bills, and stock certificates. And a sheet of paper with writing on it. "People are selling, selling, selling, they submit only orders to sell. There's talk of an imminent crash, as if this were October 1929. The enclosed sums belong to Mr. and Mrs. . . . They wanted to sell immediately. But it's Saturday. To hell with hysterical women!"

The man's prayer (concerning the women), was it realized? In any event, values did crash, and irreversibly. *Ils avaient du flair*, no doubt about it: they had a knack, those clients. As for the cash and the shares, they belong to me by all rights, for I am the sole heir. With the benefit of inventory. The wastepaper I'll toss on the street to rot.

Permit me just a nudge of protest. I'll permit myself; I've done my spiritual exercises and continue to do them. Yesterday, stepping off the sidewalk, I tripped on a cocker spaniel pup that had died of hunger or of grief. A tiny little beast. I picked it up carefully, it smelled bad; I opened the night safe outside the Crédit International on the Börsenplatz, and shoved it in.

Then I reprimanded myself. You're supposed to make peace here, don't you get it? You didn't condemn the Thieves and the Prostitutes. Don't condemn the Merchants.

•

I walk around the city.

Recognizing, with some nostalgia (me, the reactionary) where the extra-party *partiprises*, the *protestarians* of extreme protest, went to ground in the mezzanines and at the backs of courtyards. The ghetto quarter on the quays where mistrustful workers from the south were confined. The anarchists, ironically, at home in the parade grounds.

The most radical of these rebellious factions occupied a basement next to the station, and took a vow of childlessness. A garland still hanging, now trailing on the sidewalk, boldly urges: "If you are a *man*, get sterilized." The symbols and the manifestos were usually both subversive and modest, they threatened to bring about mostly innocent revolutions.

My Karpinsky might have taken part in them, he might very well have done so. His very being was a virtual, hushed accusation.

But now? I have no hope he'll step out onto one of the balconies on this alley I'm investigating behind the Hôtel Baur. A faded banner, prophetic, hangs over the street. "Capitalists, it's all over!"

•

I have no hope. Nonetheless I've come to Chrysopolis to see him (my first conscious meeting with him) and I sense that I will. See him, real and present. Upright in his white coat, bloodstains on the chest where they knifed him. Arms open. But head lowered as when, leaning against the window in my room, he would listen to me, his trousers rumpled beneath his doctor's coat.

He won't speak. It will be pointless to ask him, as I once did in the clinic, "Are you still keeping me here? Haven't I recovered?" He won't come to respond to my uncertainties, or to announce anything. He'll be the modest, simple person of back then. He'll simply come to look for me, and he's already on his way. This is a certainty, not an expectation on my part, and it frees me from all impatience.

So I sit here on a bench along the boulevard, looking at the life that's unfolding before my eyes in this strange eternity. The air shines with a dense humidity. Rainwater runs off in rivulets (the sewers in the old city must be blocked) that flow together onto the street and deposit, day by day, a thin layer of soil on the asphalt. It's not much more than a veil of earth, and yet something green is growing on it, not the usual city grass, but wild plants. The market of markets will one day be countryside. With buttercups and chicory in flower.

In my pocket I'm keeping a pack of Gauloises, for him.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

Guido Morselli read extensively throughout his life, especially philosophy, aesthetics, and literature, and he was also well informed about psychology, political theory, and various scientific matters. He annotated his books extensively and kept a record of his reading in diaries over nearly forty years, during which there were a few authors he returned to multiple times—Montaigne, Pascal—and others it's hard to imagine he read more than once (Alvin Toffler). At times he will cite or paraphrase a work or an author in such a personal way that it becomes difficult to identify the passage he has in mind. Sometimes he invented and attributed his invention to a likely source; it was one of the games he played with his notional readers. Below, where the attributions correspond to the sources, quotations come from translations of the original.

INTRODUCTION

- * evaporation, or nebulization: Scholars have generally accepted that Morselli was referring to an actual text. But so far as I've been able to determine, it's an invented reference.
- * annoyingly over-cultivated mind: Morselli's *Diario* (Adelphi, e-book, 2014) records his wide reading and thinking for the years 1938–73, and his comments on everything from Marx, Hegel, and Freud to Herbert Marcuse, Charles Reich, and Alvin Toffler. He often wrote extensive précis and notes in the margins of the books he read.
- * high prelates: Linda Terziroli, *Un Pacchetto di Gaulois: Biografia di Guido Morselli* (Rome: Castelveccchi, 2019), 218
- * he was a convinced believer: See, among others, Valentina Fortichiari, *Invito alla lettura di Morselli*, Mursia, 1984, and her Introduction and Chronology to *Guido Morselli, Romanzi Volume I*, eds. Elena Borsa and Sara D'Arienzo (Milan: Adelphi, 2002)
- * beginning with Hegel: *Diario*, December 7, 1966, commenting on a photograph of the earth (taken from Lunar Orbiter in August 1966.) The photograph, from *Corriere della Sera*, was preserved inside Morselli's Italian edition of *The Exploration of Space* by Arthur C. Clarke.
- * fight between two nurses in the violent mental asylum: The novel touches, sometimes in an offhand way, on events that were to mark the early 1970s for Italians, and not only Italians. These were years of airplane hijackings by Palestinians and Black Panthers, of radical groups both left and right involved in European and Italian terrorism, of the publication in 1972 of the Club of Rome's influential *The Limits to Growth*, and in the early 1970s the first experiments with Franco Basaglia's eventual 1978 reform abolishing insane asylums in Italy. (Tellingly, Karpinsky is killed in an asylum fight between nurses.)
- * distinct desire for androgyny: Among his papers at his death were extensive notes toward a novel, *Uonna* (*uomo + donna*, man and woman in one) in which he intended to develop his idea of an androgynous future person.

DISSIPATIO H.G.

- * Chrysopolis: The oddly named capital of Morselli's tale is a wealthy city devoted to finance. The city is never identified beyond doubt, nor is the country it's located in. The historical Chrysopolis (modern Üsküdar, in Turkey), was an ancient settlement on the Bosphorus whose name meant Golden City, possibly because it had once been a gold deposit where the Persians stored their tribute. It was founded in the seventh century BC by Greek colonists from Megara in western Attica, just a few decades before the founding of Byzantium on the opposite shore of the Bosphorus. The decisive battle between the Western Roman emperor Constantine and Licinius, the Eastern emperor, took place in AD 324 at Chrysopolis. After Byzantium was chosen as Constantine's capital, Chrysopolis would become a suburb of Constantinople.
- * antitype: In the Bible, a New Testament event or figure foreshadowed by an Old Testament equivalent.

Jonah, who emerges alive from the stomach of the whale after three days, is the type on which the antitype of the resurrected Christ depends.

- * *caput mundi*: capital of the world
- * everything's already been said . . . : In French in the Italian text: *toutes choses sont déjà dites, mais comme personne n'écoute il faut toujours recommencer*.
- * In the Marcusean sense: In 1967 Morselli read Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man*.
- * *nyctalope*: in Italian, having better than average night vision, while in English the nyctalope suffers from night blindness.
- * At a quarter past midnight: Note that there is a time shift backward between the moment he arrives at the well and the moment, seated on the ledge, that he contemplates letting himself fall into the water below. This is unlikely to be an error; it may instead be the author's way of sending time's arrow in reverse to facilitate the inexplicable.
- * *qualunquista*: Italian term used during the Fascist era to mean politically apathetic, someone who "doesn't give a damn" about ideological consistency. *démobilisateur*: French, demotivator, discourager.
- * Alceste le Misanthrope: The dislikable title character of Moliere's comedy *The Misanthrope*.
- * in Hudson Bay: Referring to Greenland, Morselli writes of Hudson Bay, but the relevant body of water is Baffin Bay.
- * Bronisław Malinowski: The Polish-born anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski's 1929 ethnography of the Trobriand islanders studied reciprocity and exchange. His masterwork was *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, 1922.
- * Lévy-Bruhl: Morselli read Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's *Theory of Primitive Mentality* in 1963.
- * *consensus opinantium*: a consensus of those with opinions, a play on *consensus sapientium*, "consensus of the wise"
- * *Scire nefas*: From Horace's Ode 1.11 "*Tu ne quaesieris*": *Tu ne quaesieris, scire nefas, quem mihi, quem tibi / finem di dederint, Leuconoe, nec Babylonios* ("Ask not ('tis forbidden knowledge), what our destined term of years, / Mine and yours; nor scan the tables of your Babylonish seers"). English translation, John Conington, *The Odes and Carmen Saeculare of Horace* (Bell and Daldy, 1872).
- * *Contraria per contraria expiantur*: roughly, "opposites atone for opposites."
- * psychoanalysis: Morselli uses the abbreviation P.A. here and on page 52. He was apparently fascinated by psychoanalysis but it remains unclear whether he ever tried it; see Morselli, *Diario*, Adelphi, 2014, n. 251.
- * *Kosmos olos en tò ponerò keitai*: και ο κόσμος όλος εν τω πονηρώ κείται, from the Bible, 1 John 5:19 in the Modern English Version.
- * Native gods are calling: From "Pagan Love Song," from the 1929 film *The Pagan*. The actual lyrics are "Native hills are calling / To them we belong."
- * *itinerarium mentis in Mortem* ("The mind's journey to death"): Plays on St. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (*The Journey of the Mind to God*), 1259.
- * *Aidez-moi!*: Charles De Gaulle made a famous appeal on French television on April 23, 1961, ("Françaises, Français, aidez-moi!") after French generals in Algeria, opposed to independence, staged a putsch.
- * large circle of shade: From Dante Alighieri, *Rime petrose*: *Al pocogiorno e al gran cerchio d'ombra / son giunto, lasso!, ed al bianchir de' colli*. ("To the dim light and the large circle of shade / I have clomb, and to the whitening of the hills.") English translation, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "Sestina of the Lady Pietra degli Scrovigni," ca. 1848.
- * total military mobilization: "Military analogies come to mind. Tourism is a parody of total

mobilization,” writes Hans Magnus Enzensberger in “A Theory of Tourism,” tr. Gerd Gemünden and Kenn Johnson, 1958. Morselli recorded this in his diary in 1973.

- * Iamblichus: Iamblichus of Chalcis (AD ca. 245–ca. 325) was a pagan Neoplatonist philosopher who wrote an influential biography of Pythagoras and whose writings helped transmit Platonic ideas in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The attribution of a text called *Dissipatio Humani Generis* to him is however almost certainly Morselli’s invention. Rosa Maria Monastra in “L’apocalisse ilarotragica di Guido Morselli” (*Synaxis* 24, Catania, 2010) argues convincingly that Morselli was just being playful and suggests that the concept of *dissipatio* seems more likely to have come from the Bible, Isaiah 24:3.
- * *solvens saeculum in favilla*: From the Latin hymn *Dies Irae*, which begins: *Dies iræ, dies illa / Solvet sæclum in favilla*. (“That day of wrath, that dreadful day / shall heaven and earth in ashes lay.”) English translation: the 1962 Missal.
- * *Mundus permanebit. . . . Viri . . .*: “The earth remains. . . . Men, women and children, human beings of all ages, classes, and nations shall suddenly be elevated [*sublimabuntur*].” The letter from Salvian he quotes from may also be Morselli’s invention.
- * *Nihil huius gloriae decet peccatorem*: “Nothing of this glory is fitting for a sinner.”
- * *natural hominis tegumentum, quasi altera cutis*: “man’s natural shell, as if another skin”
- * Deucalion: After Zeus provoked a great flood, Deucalion, who survived, was told to “cover your head and throw the bones of your mother behind your shoulder.” (The “mother” was Gaia and the “bones” were rocks.) The rocks, when thrown, became human beings.
- * *asylum ignorantiae*: Spinoza, an “asylum of stupidity”
- * “To drown in the abyss—heaven or hell, who cares”: From “Le voyage,” *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Charles Baudelaire, tr. Robert Lowell in Marthiel & Jackson Mathews, eds., *The Flowers of Evil*, New Directions, 1963.
- * *Beati in regno coelesti . . .*: English translation, James Lehrberger, *The Thomist*, vol. 80, 3, July 2016.
- * *Les célibataires sont si malheureux*: French pop song, an ironic celebration of bachelorhood, 1960, Sacha Distel. The refrain: *Les célibataires sont si malheureux, / Il faut bien prier pour eux, / Cars ils sont si solitaires, / Se couchant toujours seuls dans leur lit*. English translation kindly provided by Susan Barba.
- * The only reality: Probably from Charles Reich, *The Greening of America*, 1970, translated as *La nuova America*, Rizzoli, 1972.
- * the logic of function and fiction: From the *Diario*, December 7, 1966. Morselli questioned the Hegelian approach as overly anthropomorphic, for its conviction that “beyond the historical subject there was nothing that was not in function of man the subject or one of his ‘fictions,’ whether pragmatic or maybe just didactic.”
- * Woe to *him that is alone* (for there is no end to his toil): Ecclesiastes 4:10.
- * matter is far more prized: “At one end, raw, telluric matter, at the other, the finished, human object; and between these two extremes, nothing; nothing but a transit, hardly watched over by an attendant in a cloth cap, half-god, half-robot. So, more than a substance, plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation . . .” From Barthes, *Mythologies*, “Plastic,” first English edition, 1972. Barthes, 1957; Morselli read in 1962.
- * after the Cossacks had fired on the crowd: Morselli’s striking image doesn’t quite fit with the historical record. When in 1905, workers marched on the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, they were mowed down by Cossacks with sabers *before* they reached the square.
- * “The stethoscope falls on a white coat”: Most likely, the rather insipid verses quoted are Morselli’s invention, possibly meant to be slightly derogatory.
- * “When mankind achieves true happiness”: In Constance Garnett’s 1916 translation of *The Possessed*, “When all mankind attains happiness then there will be no more time, for there’ll be no need of it, a very true thought.”

- * *parking orbit*: In astrophysics, a temporary orbit used in launching a satellite or vehicle into space; from the parking orbit a second launch is made to boost the object into its final orbit.
- * *A parte objecti*: as it exists objectively, rather than through the eyes of the observer
- * August Hermann Francke: Francke (1663–1727) was a German Lutheran clergyman and Biblical scholar who established influential teaching methods and founded schools.
- * miniloquent: understated, retiring; the opposite of magniloquent, the word *miniloquente* is quite unusual in Italian, if not Morselli's invention.
- * *Corvus corax*, ill-omened birds of the battlefield: Carrion-eaters, ravens will feed on the bodies left out in a battlefield.